

Norwegian journalist dies in Iraq car crash

BAGHDAD (R) — One Norwegian journalist was killed and two were badly injured when their car overturned on the desert highway between Amman and Baghdad, an Iraqi ministry of culture and information official said on Wednesday. Press Centre Director Hussein Parfa said the two injured were taken to a hospital close to where the car turned over early on Wednesday 350 kilometres northwest of Baghdad. He said the three journalists from the independent Norwegian TV 2 station were on their way to the Iraqi capital from Jordan. No names were available. Travelers to and from Iraq have to use the 900-kilometre-long highway between Amman and Baghdad as the U.N. trade sanctions on Iraq ban flights to and from the country.

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Bread prices to be fixed

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government is studying fixing bread prices at 150 fils a kilogramme for white bread, and 140 fils for a kilogramme of whole wheat bread, official sources said on Wednesday. The sources said a decision will be issued soon fixing the prices, taking effect by the beginning of next month. This decision, the sources said, is designed to end the policy of subsidising bread prices. The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, is expected to be mentioned in the government's budget statement to be presented by Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh to the Lower House of Parliament before the end of this month.

Palestinian stabbed to death in Jerusalem

Agencies

A 41-year-old Palestinian street cleaner, Osama Musa Natsheh, was stabbed to death Wednesday in what police believe was an attack by an Israeli militant blamed for six other stabbings.

Hundreds joined Natsheh's funeral procession along Salah Eddin Street, the main thoroughfare of Arab east Jerusalem. Dozens of marchers broke away and hurled stones at Israeli riot police who fired teargas and rubber bullets.

Several people were wounded in the violence, including two television cameramen, witnesses said. Police said an Israeli who drove past the procession was pulled from his car by Palestinians and the vehicle was set on fire.

Jerusalem police commander Yair Yitzhaki said police were investigating links between the killing and six previous knifings of Arabs, including one fatal stabbing, in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish quarter of the city in the past year.

"Signs in the field indicate this is a murder with a nationalist background," said Israeli Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani, using police terminology for attacks between Jews and Arabs.

Israel Radio said markings on a knife found at the scene of the crime indicated the killing was the work of a Jew.



Mourners crowd around the coffin of Palestinian Osama Musa Abu Aisha Natsheh as they carry it to the family home in Arab east Jerusalem on Wednesday. A masked man stabbed the 41-year-old father of six to death in an attack which Israeli police said may have been the work of a Jewish nationalist serial killer. (Reuters photo)

Kahalani and police commander Yitzhaki declined to comment, citing a court ban on publication of details of the stabbings.

"He was stabbed by a man about whom I do not wish to speak or detail at present," Yitzhaki told reporters.

He said an Israeli man with links to ultra-nationalist Jewish groups who was briefly

held in October on suspicion of involvement in the previous stabbings had not been rearrested.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said the killing contradicted Middle East peace deals. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the crime.

"Murder is murder. We are not ready to accept the mur-

der of innocent people," Netanyahu told reporters.

Family members said a mortally wounded Natsheh was able to stammer out a few details about his killer with his dying words.

"He was on his way to work. A masked man suddenly jumped out from behind a bus and started stabbing him with a knife," said the slain

man's cousin, Abdul Raouf Natsheh. Israel Radio said the victim was a cleaning man for the municipality.

"He turned back toward home and shouted for his brothers. They came up, saw him soaked in blood, and called an ambulance," the cousin told Israeli army radio.

(Continued on page 12)

King entrusts Queen with chairing Amal Cancer Centre board of trustees

ROCHESTER (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Wednesday entrusted Her Majesty Queen Noor with chairing the Board of Trustees of the Amal Cancer Foundation of Jordan and named Dr. Abdul Salam Majali as vice-chairman, hoping to receive a list of the names of the Foundation's board members, whom you will select from among those well-known for their integrity, honesty, professional experience, love for voluntary work and dedication," the King said in his message to the Queen.

In a message to Queen Noor, King Hussein lauded her relentless efforts over the last few years, saying these efforts had yielded positive results.

The King noted that such results are not but part of the Queen's efforts in other areas, through her presidency of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation.

King Hussein thanked all those who had contributed to the achievements made, and pledged full support for the foundation.

"Now that the law of the Amal Foundation for Can-

cer has been passed, and in accordance with the Foundation's law, I hereby entrust Your Majesty with chairing its Board of Trustees, and name Dr. Abdul Salam Majali as vice-chairman, hoping to receive a list of the names of the Foundation's board members, whom you will select from among those well-known for their integrity, honesty, professional experience, love for voluntary work and dedication," the King said in his message to the Queen.

Al Amal Foundation law sets the nature of this foundation, its programmes, work mechanism, finance and its administration. It also provides for the formation of a board of trustees to supervise its work, upgrade its performance and make its services accessible to all cancer patients, be they Jor-

dans or otherwise.

Based on the recommendation of Her Majesty Queen Noor, a Royal Decree was issued on Wednesday approving the formation of the Board of Trustees as follows: the Minister of health and Medical care, the minister of social development, the director of the Royal Medical Services, deans of the faculties of medicine at the University of Jordan and Jordan University for Science and Technology, the president of the Jordan Medical Association, the president of Jordan Tumour Society, the president of the General Union of Voluntary Societies, Senator Rajai Muasher, Raef Nijm, Senator Rima Khalaf, Mawloud Abdul Qader, Abdullah Al Khaib, Nabih Muammar, Zaha Mango, Ayman Hatahet and Suheir Ali.

Test results on immunisation campaign vaccines out today

Officials confident that vaccines were safe

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — Tests conducted on vaccines given to students in a nationwide immunisation campaign in September in which hundreds of students were hospitalised are likely to show that "there was nothing wrong with the vaccines," a senior official said Wednesday. The results are due to be made public today.

"It is more likely that the results [of the tests] were positive and there is no problem with the vaccine," a senior official who requested anonymity told the Jordan Times.

The results [conducted by the World Health Organisation in Switzerland on samples of D&T vaccines]

will be submitted to the ministry's investigation committee — earlier formed to investigate the problem — which will issue the final report based on these results," Minister of Health Nael Ajlouni told the Jordan Times on Wednesday.

The special committee is scheduled to meet today to study the situation, said Ajlouni.

An investigation committee formed following the incident found that the vaccines were not contaminated, nor were inoculation procedures inadequate.

Experts then suggested that the vaccines could have been mislabelled and instead of containing a serum to prevent diphtheria and tetanus, contained a

serum for triple vaccine.

More than 300 schoolchildren — mostly aged between 11 and 15 — complained of nausea, dizziness and fever after being immunised against diphtheria and tetanus with vaccines donated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to a nationwide immunisation campaign launched on Sept. 14, involving more than 25,000 students.

Some children were hospitalised for observation.

Ajlouni earlier said that an immunisation campaign against diphtheria and tuberculosis would continue only after the ministry receives test results of vaccines suspected of causing illnesses for hundred schoolchildren.

U.N. assembly urges Palestinian self-determination

UNITED NATIONS (R) — The U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday called for self-determination for the Palestinian people, demanded Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war, and deplored the presence of a tiny number of embassies in Jerusalem.

These were among key elements of two resolutions on the situation in the Middle East and four on the question of Palestine. The two issues are debated separately each year by the assembly.

The resolutions, similar to those adopted in previous years, were again endorsed by overwhelming majorities.

The United States joined Israel in casting the only nega-

tive votes against five of the resolutions, while abstaining on the one concerning Jerusalem. It said the resolution on the Palestine question had been overtaken by events and scarcely took note of the achievements in the peace process so far.

But for the second year in a row, no resolution was introduced endorsing the Middle East peace process because it would have spotlighted differences rather than fostered accord.

The main stumbling block was a reference to the principle of land for peace, which Arab states wished to include in the draft and which Israel said was an attempt to add elements to the peace process that were not part of its original terms of ref-

erence.

A so-called "positive resolution" backing the peace process was first introduced in 1993 by the United States and Russia, as sponsors of Israel-Palestinian negotiations, and by Norway, which hosted initial contacts between the two sides. Such a resolution was adopted annually until last year.

A resolution on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine was adopted by a vote of 154 to two with three abstentions.

It stressed the need for "the realisation of the rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination."

It stopped just short of calling for statehood, which Pales-

tinian President Yasser Arafat has said he will proclaim if negotiations with Israel are not completed within a five-year transitional period under the 1993 Oslo peace accords ends on May 4, 1999.

The same resolution also called for Israel's withdrawal from "the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967" and stressed the "necessity for commitment to the principle of land for peace."

It also stressed the need for resolving the Palestinian refugee problem in conformity with a 1948 resolution that called for repatriation or compensation.

The resolution urged U.N. members to expedite economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people and

emphasised the importance for the United Nations to play a more active and expanded role in the peace process.

A United States-led conference in Washington on Monday raised pledges of more than \$3 billion to help the Palestinians build their economy and bolster the peace process.

Three other resolutions adopted by the assembly supported continued activity by U.N. bodies that support the Palestinians, including the U.N. committee on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the U.N. secretariat's division for Palestinian rights, and programmes on the question of Palestine by the U.N. department of public information.

U.N. approves oil spare parts for Iraq

BAGHDAD (R) — The United Nations Sanctions Committee on Iraq has approved 23 more contracts for spare parts to repair Iraq's sanctions-hit oil industry, a U.N. report said.

"During the week to 27 November... the Security Council's 661 committee approved 23 contracts with a total value of \$11,504,840," said the report handed to reporters on Wednesday.

The total approved contracts is now 175 worth \$14,311,672," it said, adding "the number of contracts currently on hold was 100 with a total value of \$15,073,552."

It said the contracts were with companies from Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Singapore, Turkey, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. They range from pipeline to machine spare parts.

The report, issued by the office of Iraq programme in New York, said that the total of contracts received for approval was 379 with a value of \$195.5 million.

U.N. spokesman George

Somerwill said that some oil spare parts ordered by Iraq had arrived in the country last week.

"A shipment of 5,250 drums of demulsifier had arrived in Iraq last week," he told Reuters. The material is a chemical for the treatment of crude oil.

Iraqi Deputy Oil Minister Taha Humood said on Tuesday Iraq had not received any spare parts to repair Iraq's oil industry which was heavily bombed during the 1991 Gulf war over Kuwait.

Humood said that Baghdad had already signed spare parts contracts worth \$300 million, the amount allowed by the U.N. Security Council to be spent under the oil deal.

He blamed U.S. and British envoys in the committee for delaying approval of the spare parts contracts.

Somerwill also said the first shipment of foodstuffs via the Syrian port of Tartus had arrived in Iraq. He said some 10,000 tonnes of sugar arrived in Iraq out of 25,000 tonnes of sugar which Baghdad purchased from France under the oil deal.

Levy demands finance ministry

TEL AVIV (R) — The self-styled champion of Israel's working class, David Levy, said on Wednesday he was ready to rejoin Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government so long as he got the job of finance minister.

Shares on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange fell shortly after Levy's announcement. "He is a tax-and-spend kind of guy," said Ira Slomowitz of IBI Investment House.

Levy, 60, quit as foreign minister in January, taking his five-member Geshet movement out of the ruling

coalition while accusing Netanyahu of moving too slowly on peace and failing to help low-income groups. Netanyahu wants to strengthen a right-wing government deeply divided over the U.S.-brokered land-for-security deal he signed with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at the white House in October.

After meeting Netanyahu on Wednesday for the first time in months, Levy told reporters he had rejected an offer to take Finance Minister Yaacov Neeman's job instead.

"Two jobs were offered to me — the finance minister or the national infrastructure minister... I told the prime minister I am not taking the infrastructure portfolio. I believe it is in my ability to hold the other important portfolio," Levy said.

The prime minister's office said the two men would meet again on Thursday.

Critics in Netanyahu's Likud and other coalition parties accuse him of surrendering West Bank land they believe is essential to Israeli security and the Jew-

Italian prime minister says Ocalan and Kurds are an EU issue

ROME (R) — Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema said on Wednesday the case of Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan involved the entire European Union (EU) and that any EU initiative would not interfere in Turkey's internal affairs.

Addressing Italy's lower house of parliament, D'Alema said Ocalan, the leader of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), could be tried in a third country under international conventions against ter-

rorism, but did not specify where.

"Ocalan has to be brought to trial for the acts of terrorism with which he is charged," said D'Alema, who may ultimately have to decide the fate of Ocalan, the leader of a 14-year rebellion in southeast Turkey who was arrested in Rome three weeks ago.

"There is undoubtedly a need to ensure a fair trial of a person who is accused of grave terrorist crimes. A fair trial would include the right

for him to defend himself... a trial in which a person being accused can also put forward his motives."

Any EU initiative for an international court to try Ocalan and help find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem did not constitute interference in Turkey's internal affairs, he said.

Because Turkey had asked to join the EU, the EU had a duty to look at whether human rights criteria were being respected.

"Apart from that," D'Alema added, "the repercussions of the conflict in Turkey have a direct effect inside the countries of the EU... through waves of immigration... which could constitute a danger to the internal security of these countries."

Italy says it arrested Ocalan on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Germany. But Germany has declined to ask for extradition because of potential unrest among its two million immi-

grant Turks and Kurds.

A request by Turkey cannot be considered because Italy cannot extradite a suspect to a country where he could face the death penalty.

Turkey blames Ocalan and the PKK for the deaths of more than 29,000 people caused by Kurdish fighters and Turkish armed forces during their guerrilla war.

To show solidarity with the Kurdish people in no way means showing solidarity with terrorism. D'Alema

told a packed Chamber of Deputies.

"We appreciate the fact that when he arrived in this country, Ocalan renounced terrorism," he added.

"But this does not mean Italy will shrink from its commitment to a correct trial to hear the charges that have been lodged against him in the past."

Since arriving in Italy, Ocalan has condemned terrorism and applied for political asylum.



Salim Al Hoss

adopted by the previous government in drafting our 1999 budget... Fears about the financial situation are all illusions."

(Continued on page 12)

Hoss returns as Lebanon premier

BEIRUT (R) — New President Emile Lahoud named veteran politician Salim Al Hoss as Lebanon's prime minister Wednesday, replacing billionaire Rafik Al Hariri who led six years of post-civil war reconstruction.

A presidential palace statement said Lahoud had chosen the 68-year-old Hoss, an economist respected across the sectarian spectrum, to form the cabinet after he was backed by 95 of parliament's 128 members.

Construction tycoon Hariri refused Monday to carry on under the forceful Lahoud, shocking Lebanon's financial markets

although the impact has been minimal as investors await the formation of a new government.

Economists considered Hariri a key force for development but Hoss, who was in and out of the prime minister's office several times during the 1975-90 civil war, moved quickly Wednesday to reassure the markets.

"The challenges we have to face are many, primarily the budget deficit which will be discussed in our first meeting in addition to the economic and financial situation," he said.

"We will maintain the stringent fiscal policies

U.N. officials said Annan Morocco has accused ple died.

Annan said on Monday the Polisario had given him a "clear yes" on his plan and that he was working with Morocco to clarify some questions raised by Rabat to win final approval.

ities for talks expected to focus on handing over two Libyan suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am plane over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in which 170 peo-

ROWING RACE MARKS NATIONAL DAY IN DUBAI: Traditional rowing boats race Wednesday beside the Abu Dhabi coastline. The race was held to mark the 27th national day of the United Arab Emirates (Reuters photo)

weapons inspectors. The ruling Baath Party newspaper Al Thawra said Egypt should have rejected completely a statement last month by Damascus declaration the Damascus Declaration [meeting], the paper said in a front-page editorial.

Damascus Declaration signatories (Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the U.N. weapons inspectors. "Egypt should have been at least refrained from signing that statement," the paper added.

The paper said the Doha against Iraq last month after Baghdad promised to let U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors resume their task for dismantling Iraq's prohibited

sion two weeks later.

Al Thawra also criticized a recent meeting between French President Jacques Chirac and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in which they discussed the Iraqi in-

the Damascus Declaration [meeting]," the paper said in a front-page editorial.

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against Iraq last month after Baghdad promised to let U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors resume their task for dismantling Iraq's prohibited

Al Thawra also criticised a recent meeting between French President Jacques Chirac and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in which they discussed the Iraqi issue.

OSLO (Petra) — Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib on Wednesday praised the role of the Economic Cooperation and Security Organisation in enhancing international peace and security and easing tension in different parts of the world. Addressing a meeting of the organisation's ministerial council in Oslo, Khatib said the organisation has contributed to the establishment of an institutional framework for conflict resolution by diplomatic means, thus contributing to establishing peace, enhancing security and easing tension.

21:40 Cairo (MS)
01:55 Moscow (SU)
02:15 Amsterdam (KL)
04:45 Alexandria (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

For Thursday

07:00 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Agaba (from QAIA) (RW)
22:00 Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW)

For Friday

07:00 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)

18:15 Abu Dhabi, Muscat (GF)

For Friday
07:00 Aqaba (from Marka Air-
 port) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Air-
 port) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Air-
 port) (RW)

port) (RW)
08:30 Agaba (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Air-
port) (RW)

Deputies suspend debate on proposal for lawmakers' pensions

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh

AMMAN — After much deliberation, lawmakers on Wednesday decided to postpone discussion of a new proposal that would grant them retirement benefits similar to those enjoyed by ministers.

The government on Nov. 24 proposed an amendment to the civil pension law that would grant retirement allowances to parliamentarians who do not receive such benefits from other government departments.

Deputy Speaker Bassam Haddadin told the Jordan Times on Wednesday that only a small percentage of lawmakers would benefit from the amendment since "almost 80 per cent of them" are retired army officers or civil service employees.

Currently, deputies and senators do not receive any form of pension even if they served in Parliament for as long as 15 years, Haddadin said.

He noted that ministers, for example, receive handsome retirement benefits even if they serve for one day.

Deputy Nazih Ammarin, a physician from Karak, said parliamentarians should not consider the proposal.

"I believe there will be negative and dangerous consequences for the performance and reputation of the

House if this law is passed," he told the House. "I had hoped that the government would have presented us with a legislation that would abolish [pensions for both ministers and parliamentarians]."

Ammarin said he would like to see deputies assume powers equal to ministers but not the ability to match them in "their abuse of public funds."

During yesterday's session, the House formed its 14 committees: the judiciary; economic and finance; Arab and international affairs (foreign affairs); administrative; education, culture and youth; national guidance; health and environment; water and agriculture; social development and work; energy and mineral resources; public services, tourism and antiquities; public freedom and citizens' rights; Palestine; and the media and the rural committee.

The Arab and International Affairs, the Economic and Finance and the Judiciary committees are usually the most contested. This year, however, following the recent water contamination crisis that hit western Amman, the demand for membership in the Water and Agriculture Committee — which helped former chairperson Salameh Hani

become such a well-known figure — seems to have risen considerably.

Those elected to the 11-member Arab and International Affairs Committee were: Arjaf Majali, Abdul Razzaq Tbaishat, Ahmad Innab, Ayed Adaleh, Abdulrahman Jazzi, Ali Abu Rbeih, Rashid Braissheh, Hazem Momani, Ahmad Ajarmeh, Mohammad Abu Hdeib and Nayef Moulah.

The following deputies are on the Economic and Finance Committee: Ali Abul Ragheb, Mohammad Abu Hdeib, Osama Malkawi, Munir Sobar, Mansour Ben Tarif, Khalil Atiyeh, Mifteh Rhaimee, Samir Kassar, Nashat Hamarnah, Ra'd Bakri and Hazem Momani.

The following were elected to the Judiciary Committee: Rashed Brasseh, Ghaleb Zou'bi, Osama Malkawi, Hashem Waked, Abdullah Zraikat, Mahmoud Kharabsheh, Abdul Razzaq Ensour, Mohammad Bataineh, Raji Haddad, Abdul Razzaq Tbaishat and Mohammad Azaideh.

The new members of the Water and Agriculture Committee are: Salameh Hani, Mansour Ben Tarif, Bajjis Hadid, Ayed Adaleh, Bakht Hajayah, Soudki Shabattar, Fawaz Zou'bi, Riad Daoud, Samir Kassar, Mijhem Skour and Saleh Jbour.

JPA threatens lawsuit if government closes 'non-compliant' newspapers

Press association, PPD in dispute over law's interpretation

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association yesterday threatened legal action against the government if it decides to order five newspapers closed for failing to meet the capital requirement of the Press and Publications Law.

In a harsh statement, the JPA yesterday said, "The Jordan Press Association will resort to the judicial system should any order be issued to stop the publication of any newspaper."

"It will do so to present its views and refute the legal provisions [of the Press and Publications Law No. 8 for 1998]," the statement said.

The JPA also accused the government of circumventing the association's role in media affairs, after the Bureau for the Interpretation of Law at the Prime Ministry ruled on Tuesday that the law applies both to existing newspapers and those

seeking to enter the market.

The JPA has argued that the financial requirements of the press law should not apply to newspapers already publishing. The association says it was not allowed to communicate this position directly to the bureau before it read the law, while representatives from the Press and Publications Department (PPD), which advocates applying every article of the law to all newspapers, were present at the bureau's session.

"The JPA board believes the method which was applied in order to obtain a decision from the bureau clearly indicates the intention [official] circles of marginalising the role of the JPA and of failing to take its views into account," the statement said. "The JPA believes it should have been present in order to reflect its own position on this matter because it is the party which requested an interpretation of the law, not

the PPD."

According to Article 13 of the law, daily newspapers must prove a capital of JD500,000, while non-daily publications are required to pay a minimum capital of JD100,000.

Article 51 states that "every owner of a periodical that is subjected to the law should adjust his position in accordance with the articles of this law within 90 days... the licence of any publication that does not adjust its position [within] 90 days will be revoked."

The PPD last month called on newspapers to rectify their financial status by Dec. 1 in accordance with the 1998 press law, enacted by Parliament this summer. All of the country's five daily newspapers and all but five of 20-odd weekly newspapers met the deadline. Only Al Mithaq, Al Hadaf, Sawt Al Mar'a, Akhbar Al Osbou and Fares failed to

show compliance.

The government, which has promised a soft implementation of the press law, as yet has not indicated it would close down any paper.

Information Minister Nasser Judeh Monday said, "Most papers have rectified their situations. If there is any delay, it is due to logistical reasons. Therefore, the government will be flexible and has no intention of taking immediate and narrow-minded decisions."

Yesterday, PPD Director Iyad Qattan countered that the department, not the JPA, had sought the bureau's interpretation of Articles 13 and 51, and said the department's request for an interpretation was intended to represent both the PPD and the JPA. According to bureau procedures, the party requesting an explanation of a law can send representatives to the session. However, said Qattan, any representative at

the reading does not have the right to comment further.

"These questions were addressed to the highest judicial authority entitled to explain the laws of Jordan," Qattan said last night. "The questions on the law were agreed on in the Information Ministry and between the legal advisors of the Information Ministry and the JPA. The lawyers of the JPA and the PPD were asked to dictate their questions in legal terms, which I put, into a letter addressed to the bureau and which was signed by minister Nasser Judeh."

Qattan indicated that the Information Ministry had been taken aback by the JPA's sharply worded statement, saying that the government has been trying to implement the law "in the best and nicest way possible."

"We are trying to improve relations," he said.

During U.N. General Assembly meeting Jordan criticises Israeli drive to change status of Arab east Jerusalem

NEW YORK (Petra) — Jordan has criticised Israel's ongoing drive to alter the status of Arab east Jerusalem, describing this policy as unacceptable and in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

"Any Israeli changes to the Holy City's legal, political and demographic nature is designed to create new facts on the ground and to impose a de facto situation on the Arab side in final status negotiations," said Jordanian Ambassador to the U.N. Hassan Abu Nimrah.

Addressing a special U.N. General Assembly meeting on Tuesday to discuss the situation in the Middle East, Abu Nimrah said: "In view of the situation and in a bid to safeguard the religious, historic and cultural character of the city, the Jordanian government is keen on pursuing its efforts towards protecting the holy places which are still under occupation until a final and just solution has been found

to the whole problem."

"The city of Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the three monotheistic religions, and we seek to preserve it as a sublime symbol for peace and co-existence," said Abu Nimrah.

Calling for the restoration of Arab east Jerusalem to Arab sovereignty, Abu Nimrah said that "the end of the occupation of the Arab sector of the Holy City does not mean the city's partition but rather a reaffirmation of rights and an exercise of justice."

"The Jerusalem issue is a basic focal point in the peace talks... and therefore a lasting settlement is an inevitable move towards establishing peace," he said, adding that "there is an overwhelming international consensus that Arab east Jerusalem is an integral part of the West Bank... and therefore it is subject to the Fourth Geneva Convention and the [relevant] Security Council resolutions."

Abu Nimrah pointed out

that the Security Council "has given the question of Jerusalem particular attention ever since Israel occupied the city and has passed numerous resolutions that reject any changes to the city's geographical and demographic character."

Calling on the world community to intervene and ensure the implementation of U.N. resolutions, Abu Nimrah said: "The world community should play a vital role in giving impetus to the peace process and the European Union should exert all possible efforts to back the co-sponsors of the peace process and create the appropriate climate for its success."

He said Jordan is looking forward to witnessing greater international interest in helping meet the Middle East's economic, financial and developmental requirements so that its peoples can build a lasting peace.



Pilar Jurado and Julio Munoz perform during Tuesday evening's concert (Photo by Jean-Claude Elias)

Concert presents blend of Spanish classical, operatic styles

By Jean-Claude Elias

AMMAN — A concert presented Tuesday evening by Instituto Cervantes was a fine, balanced and entertaining combination of two different styles: authentic Spanish classical music and popular opera arias by Mozart, Rossini and Puccini, among others.

Pilar Jurado, mezzo-soprano, Manuel Rodriguez on flute and Julio Munoz on piano delivered a first class performance, characterised by subtlety, musicality and highly professional technical skills. The versatile, sincere moving voice of Jurado, the magic flute Rodriguez

and the intelligent piano performance of Munoz contributed to make the trio one of the best of the genre.

Even those in the audience who did not understand

REVIEW

Spanish were charmed by the pieces that were played in the first part of the programme. The beauty of the compositions and the artists' talent were more than enough to delight the listeners.

During the first part of their performance, the trio played pieces by Torroba, Guridi, Nin, Buser and

Lorca. The second part started with "Il Re Pastore" by Mozart, followed by beautiful arias by Donizetti and an amazing "Fantasie Brillante" consisting of variations on Bizet's famous opera "Carmen." After an excerpt from Puccini's "La Boheme," Rossini's "Una Voce Poco Fa" from the Barber of Seville won the performers a standing ovation. An encore kept them on stage for one more number.

The successful event was organised in cooperation with the National Music Conservatory of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation and was held at the Terra Sancta Cultural Centre.

Final report on IPC pipelines sale expected Thursday

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The final report of the government's investigations into the Iraqi Petroleum Company pipelines sale is expected to be completed Thursday, Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki said yesterday.

"The heads of the two government assessment committees will meet Thursday with representatives of the Audit Bureau in order to finalise a combined report, which will be discussed during the Cabinet meeting next week," Mulki told the Jordan Times.

"The two committees on the IPC case have [already] concluded their assessments of the pipelines deal from the administrative and technical aspects," he added.

The government formed the committees on Nov. 22, one day after halting the JD250,000 sale of part of the IPC pipeline and ordering that work on removing the pipelines be stopped. Segments already removed have been stored at the Aqaba Region Authority pending the completion of the investigations into the legality of the bid and studies of alternative uses of the pipelines.

Last Monday, Mulki said that following the Cabinet's review of the final report, the government would "decide whether there is a case that needs to be sent to the prosecutor general or not."

The government has reaffirmed its decision to store all IPC pipelines at the Aqaba

Region Authority under guard pending the completion of the investigations, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported Wednesday.

Acting upon instructions from Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, Interior Minister Nayef Qadi ordered the police department in Aqaba to take the appropriate measures to ensure that the instructions are carried out in full.

Petra also said Tarawneh asked the Interior Ministry to ascertain whether the contractor was abiding by the government decision to halt work on the pipeline.

Mulki, who was authorised by the government to follow up on the IPC case, had sent two legal memorandums to Akram Amin Abu Amr, who won the bid on July 20, 1998, telling him to stop work immediately as he was violating the deal by taking parts of another pipeline that were not included in the official bid.

But Abu Amr himself claimed in a letter sent to the head of the Water Authority, dated Aug. 10, that several pipeline components listed in the official bid were not found because no maps were available.

The pipeline, linking Iraq's northern city of Kirkuk with the Mediterranean city of Haifa via Jordan, was totally shut down after the 1948 war that led to Israel's creation.

It was initially built by a British company in the early 1930s for the Iraqi Petroleum Company.

Chilean trade delegation visits Amman

By Munther Murjan

AMMAN — A top Chilean delegation, headed by Chile's former ambassador to Jordan, Jorge Iglesias, is touring the region to try and open up non-traditional markets for its main exports of copper and salt.

Iglesias, who heads the Middle East-Africa Department at the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made a brief stopover in Amman on Tuesday as part of the "PROCHILE" campaign to promote Chilean business within the region. His tour will also take him to Syria and Lebanon.

Iglesias met with leading Jordanian businesspersons, showed them a video on

Chilean export-oriented products and briefed them on investment and trade opportunities in Chile.

He said Santiago, whose trade has long focused on South American countries and North America followed by the Far East, was now trying to concentrate on the Middle East as a potential future strategic partner.

"Our main interest is to expand our trade ties with the rest of the world," said Iglesias.

Copper and salt comprised 40 per cent of Chile's total exports of \$1.8 billion last year.

"The main challenge facing us now is to expand the export of other products such as wood, fish, canned food, wine and apples. And we look at the Middle East as our

long-term strategic partner," Iglesias told a press briefing.

Chile has recently opened trade offices in Jordan, the West Bank town of Ramallah, Tunisia and Morocco.

Iglesias said Jordan's economic reforms, launched in 1989, had further encouraged Chile to eye Jordan as a potential trade and investment partner.

However, bilateral Jordanian-Chilean trade ties remain almost non-existent.

"Our main importer in the region is Saudi Arabia, which accounts for 35 per cent of total exports to the Middle East, while with Jordan, exports are almost zero," Iglesias said.

Aviation security training centre opens next week

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — A regional aviation security training centre will be inaugurated in Amman next week, an official said Wednesday.

"The centre will graduate security experts who will be qualified to train others in security in the civil aviation industry," said Taisir Tajj, director of Queen Noor Civil Aviation Training College.

Jordan was chosen by the International Civil Aviation

Organisation (ICAO) to host the regional centre over several neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Egypt, Jasser Ziyayad, director of the Civil Aviation Authority, told the Jordan Times.

With the selection, Jordan became the eighth such training centre in the world.

The centre's first class will include four Jordanian trainees and another 11 from Yemen, Turkey and Egypt, said Tajj.

The official opening of the project on Dec. 8 will come one

day after the observance of World Civil Aviation Day, said Ziyayad.

The centre will conduct three to six training courses for around 24 security experts each year, Ziyayad added.

Training will be free for ICAO members, according to Tajj.

The centre is expected to expand to eventually provide services to institutions outside the aviation industry, and the revenues from this service will go to the Civil Aviation Authority, said Ziyayad.

The training centre is designated to serve the following countries: Pakistan, Iran, Israel, the Arab Gulf countries, Egypt, Yemen, Turkey, the Palestinian National Authority areas, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.

The project will be funded by ICAO donors, while countries such as Germany, Belgium and the United States will provide the centre with instructors. Jordan will provide the premises in which the training courses will be conducted, Ziyayad told the Jordan Times.

what's going on

CONCERT

* Classical musical performance by "The Baghdad Group" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday Dec. 12 at 7:30 p.m.

THE EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL

* Austrian film "Tafelberg" on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.
* Two Belgian films "Een Griekse Tragedie" and "Rosa Danst Rosas" on Thursday at 8:00 p.m. (both films will also be screened on Friday Dec. 4 at 5:00 p.m.)
* German film "Nach Puri im Urwald" on Friday at 8:00 p.m.
* The films, subtitled in English, are shown at the Royal Cultural Centre. (Film shows will be briefly interrupted and

resumed for the duration Dec. 11-18).

FILMS

* Spanish film "La Revoltosa" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.
* "Meeting and dialogue with Tunisian-based Algerian artist Rashid Koraishi" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

CHRISTMAS CHARITY BAZAAR

* Annual Christmas charity bazaar, sponsored by the American Women of Amman, at the Marriott Hotel on Friday 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. (Tel. 5699634).

EXHIBITIONS

* Photography exhibition "Empreintes" (a photography trip from Morocco to Turkey) at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 17.
* Works of 17 British artists and painters from the Nineteenth Century at the British Council, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 10.
* Oil paintings by Ali Najjar at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 14.
* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2, until Jan. 28).
* Photography exhibition entitled "Windows and Doors" by Hani Hourani at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5537598), until Dec. 18.

Xmas & Ramadan

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Indonesians protest outside palace

JAKARTA (R) — Two senior aides of Indonesian President B.J. Habibie met a group of student protesters Wednesday as thousands more demonstrated outside the presidential palace and around the capital.

It is the first time pro-democracy protests have been allowed outside the palace, in central Merdeka (Freedom) Square, and the first time senior presidential aides have met a student delegation.

The talks took place in the state secretariat next door to the palace. Habibie refused to meet the group.

About 1,000 students demonstrated peacefully on the road outside the two buildings during the 30-minute meeting with military secretary Budi Santoso and cabinet vice-secretary Erman Rajaguk. The protesters later dispersed peacefully.

Scattered protests were staged elsewhere in the capital, demanding Habibie and armed forces chief, General Wiranto, quit and the president's disgraced predecessor, Suharto, be

tried for abused during his harsh 32-year rule.

But in their meeting with Santoso and Rajaguk, the 17 students also demanded Wiranto accept responsibility on behalf of the military for past human rights abuses.

Earlier, Habibie urged protesters to get off the streets and push for reforms through the political system.

"It is impossible for us to achieve reform on the streets," he told a community group. "We must all take the same path."

"As a nation which loves unity and peace, and fights injustice and poverty... we must choose the constitutional way."

Thousands of students held separate demonstrations around Jakarta Wednesday, targeting the attorney-general's office, parliament and trying again to march on the home of Suharto.

However, there were no reports of violence.

As they do daily, heavily armed riot troops stopped a group of several hundred students within about one



Hundreds of students ride on top of buses on the streets of central Jakarta. The students held separate demonstrations around Jakarta demanding a full and open inquiry into former President Suharto's wealth, estimated by some at \$40 billion (Reuters photo)

kilometre of Suharto's home.

About 1,500 more gathered outside the attorney-general's office demanding a full and open inquiry into the Suharto family's wealth, estimated by some at \$40 billion.

Habibie, Suharto's hand-

picked successor, has ordered the attorney-general to investigate the former president's wealth and has promised a separate independent probe.

But critics say these are mere whitewashes by a government with many members who owe their

position to Suharto.

The capital was calm Wednesday, with no signs of feared Muslim backlash after rampaging Christian youths torched several mosques and other Islamic buildings in the remote eastern town of Kupang Monday.

But street crime is on the rise as law and order breaks down under the weight of the political crisis.

Several embassies have warned their nationals to stay inside at night or exercise extreme caution on the streets and avoid large crowds.

Cambodia announces plan to cut troop strength

PHNOM PENH (R) — Cambodia's armed forces must shed jobs as the government diverts funds from security into health and education. Prime Minister Hun Sen told senior military officials on Wednesday.

Hun Sen said the cut in troop strength had to be undertaken carefully and demobilised soldiers had to be assured of a decent living in civil society.

"The armed forces must be reformed to be professional, an appropriate size and capability... according to the government's political platform," Hun Sen told defence ministry officials.

"The reform of the military is a very important issue. We will do our best to reach an appropriate number and reduce the national budget spent on the army and (instead) spend on health, education and social welfare," he said.

Hun Sen did not say how many men the government wanted to demobilise.

Cambodia's armed forces number an estimated 150,000 men, most of them in the army. But some military analysts say a significant number are "ghost" soldiers, registered so cor-

rupt officers can pocket their pay.

In recent years Cambodia has spent up to 50 per cent of its budget on security. Economists say funds have to be diverted away from the military into more productive areas if the country is to develop.

The recent collapse of the Khmer Rouge guerrilla force offered Hun Sen's new government a golden opportunity to get to grips with military reform, analysts say.

Hun Sen said it was vital that demobilised soldiers were offered training and alternative work. He said the World Bank had offered to fund projects aimed at helping soldiers make the career change.

Hun Sen also said a neutral army was the backbone of democracy and military men had to remain impartial when it came to party politics.

He said he wanted the speedy integration of opposition forces loyal to Prince Norodom Ranariddh back into the government army.

Troops loyal to Ranariddh battled government forces under Hun Sen after he ousted Ranariddh, then senior co-premier, in a

bloody coup in July last year.

Hun Sen, whose ruling party narrowly won a July general election, and Ranariddh agreed last month to a new coalition government.

The reintegration of Ranariddh's forces, now based in isolated strongholds on the border with Thailand, was a key element of their coalition pact.

Hun Sen also said the last Khmer Rouge fighters still holding out in remote areas along the Thai border were welcome to give up their fight and rejoin society.

Hun Sen has said Khmer Rouge leaders must be brought to justice.

A small team of legal experts appointed by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan visited Cambodia last month to assess evidence against Khmer Rouge leaders in preparation for a evidence international tribunal.

An estimated 1.7 million people died during Khmer Rouge rule in the 1970s either from torture, disease, malnutrition or overwork. The group's paramilitary leader, Pol Pot, died of an apparent heart-attack in a remote zone in April.

Appeal for release of detained China dissidents

BEIJING (R) — Nearly 200 Chinese dissidents Wednesday appealed for the immediate release of three key members of a fledgling opposition party detained by police in Beijing's latest crackdown on organised dissent.

Separately, two students leaders of the ill-fated 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations began a 48-hour hunger strike demanding the release of senior dissidents Xu Wenli, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai, said the Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China.

The Hong Kong-based group also quoted a letter by 191 pro-democracy campaigners from 22 provinces as saying the detention of the trio on Monday illustrated the authorities' "hypocrisy."

The detention of Xu, China's top dissident, sparked sharp criticism with the United States.

"We conveyed our strong views to officials in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs today in Beijing and urged the authorities to release Xu immediately," said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

"We view his detention for peacefully exercising fundamental freedoms guaranteed by international human rights instruments as a serious step in the wrong direction," Rubin added.

"We view his detention for peacefully exercising fundamental freedoms

guaranteed by international human rights instruments as a serious step in the wrong direction," Rubin added.

The Chinese foreign ministry had no immediate comment on Rubin's remarks.

Xu, 55, chairman of the Chinese Democratic Party's cells in Beijing and the northern port city of Tianjin, was taken from his home in the Chinese capital Monday.

Police described Xu as a "criminal suspect" but gave no details of his alleged criminal activities. China, which brooks no opposition to the Communist Party, has not allowed Xu's Chinese Democratic Party to register as a legal organisation.

"They cannot shake Xu Wenli from his determination to be involved in the cause of democracy and human rights," said his wife He Xintong, a retired teacher.

"They cannot make me waver from supporting Xu Wenli," she said.

Qin Yongmin, 45, was formally detained in Wuhan, capital of the central province of Hubei, Monday on charges of "plotting to overthrow the state," according to his father Qin Qingguo.

If charged and convicted, Qin could be sentenced to life in prison. His mother died of heart failure hours before the activist was taken into custody. She was 76.

Wang Youcai, a former student leader of the 1989 pro-democracy demon-

strations that were crushed by the army, was formally arrested Monday.

That meant Wang, one of the founding members of the Chinese Democratic Party, would be charged, a spokesman for the Hong Kong human rights group said.

There was no official confirmation of the detentions.

The Hong Kong human rights group said two key members of the Chinese Democratic Party were released Wednesday and a third has been detained, leaving nine still in police custody.

China's tiny band of dissidents have been harassed by police since they launched an unprecedented challenge to the Communist Party by setting up the Chinese Democratic Party — in June.

China signed in October the U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which among other things guarantees freedom of assembly and speech.

Not only has China's human rights record not improved, but it has worsened with the authorities intensifying persecution of dissidents, the letter from the pro-democracy campaigners said.

Last week Li Peng, chairman of the National People's Congress, ruled out Western-style democracy and multi-party politics in an interview with the German business daily Handelsblatt.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Duma demands medical report on Yeltsin's health

MOSCOW (R) — The Lower House of the Russian Parliament passed a resolution Wednesday demanding that Kremlin doctors present to the chamber a medical report on President Boris Yeltsin's health. A total of 247 deputies of opposition-dominated state Duma voted for the non-binding resolution on Yeltsin, whose health problems have long kept him away from his Kremlin office. Thirty-three voted against. Aides say Yeltsin is convalescing at a Moscow hospital from pneumonia. The resolution called for the Kremlin's chief doctor to draw up the report and present it to the Duma within ten days. It also said the Duma would prepare a request to the constitutional court to clarify the procedure for stripping the president of his powers on health grounds. The constitution says this can be done "in connection with an extended incapacitation", but does not elaborate. The Communist-led Duma is already working on an impeachment bid against Yeltsin, accusing him among other things of destroying the Soviet Union in 1991, crushing a parliamentary rebellion with tanks in 1993 and starting war in breakaway Chechnya in 1994. However the constitution, written under Yeltsin's rule makes it all but impossible to impeach the president.

Rwanda releases 76 genocide suspects from prison

KIGALI (R) — Seventy-six genocide suspects have been released from prison in Rwanda, the first of 10,000 suspects the government plans to free for lack of evidence or incomplete files, the Rwanda News Agency reported. The decision taken in October to release the suspects caused an outcry from genocide survivors group who said they had been betrayed by the justice system. An estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered during 100 days of killings by extremist Hutus in 1994. The 76 suspects were released Tuesday from Rilima prison, south of the capital Kigali, where last month the ministry of justice reported at least 40 inmates had died of an "unidentified disease". Rwanda's jail and communal lock-ups are crisscrossed with over 125,000 genocide suspects awaiting trial. Genocide survivors say they are concerned that the released prisoners may embark on the killings to remove evidences against them, while the suspects themselves fear revenge attacks from those who lost relatives. The Local Criminal Court Prosecutor Sylvester Gatumbwe said the suspects would be sent back to their home villages, but added this had been complicated by prisoners giving false names and addresses. If more evidence was produced, the released prisoners they could be re-arrested, he added. "The release of the suspects is provisional, if their neighbours come up with enough evidence against them they will be put back into prison," Gatumbwe said. Genocide survivors have criticised delays in bringing suspects to trial. After a year of hearings in criminal courts, only about 400 suspects have so far been sentenced. More than 120 have been given the death penalty. The first 22 were executed in public on April 25 in five different locations.

Nigerian ruler tells army to leave power forever

ABUJA (R) — Nigerian military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar told the armed forces they must give up power forever next May. "Coups making has long ceased to be fashionable and anyone who may have come to terms with that reality is only engaging in self-delusion," Abubakar said in a strongly worded message which was also addressed to the police. Abubakar, who assumed power after the sudden death of dictator Sani Abacha in June, has promised to step down on May 28 for an elected civilian. Saturday local elections mark the same step in returning civilian administration to the west African country which has been ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960. "A major consequence of prolonged military rule has been the grave lessening of professionalism among officers and men to which all of you gathered here are living witness," said Abubakar, bemoaning the loss of military officers to political posts. "Esprit de corps is dangerously undermined and the sense of cohesion to the operational effectiveness of our services has been dangerously eroded," he added.

Pakistanis held 'not terrorists'

BANGKOK (R) — Thai police said Wednesday four Pakistanis they feared had been plotting a bomb attack during the Asian Games were not terrorists but businessmen who have overstayed their visas. Assistant National Police Chief Lieutenant Colonel Thawatchai Pallee told a news conference that suspected bomb-making components, which police said had been seized from suspects, had not belonged to them. He said the fuses and electrical components were of a type used by mining firms to fire demolition charges. "After a thorough investigation we found they are not terrorists and they have no record linking them to terrorist groups," he said. "So the suspects will only face charges for overstaying and be deported later." The four men were detained after police raided a rented house on the eastern outskirts of Bangkok Tuesday, police said. Their landlord told reporters they were ordinary businessmen and that the components had not belonged to them. A special Thai military task force assigned to cope with terrorist threats during Asian Games began operation Wednesday. A military spokesman said earlier there were grounds for suspecting the four Pakistanis are terrorists and that their detention was the result of cooperation between the police and military. Police have launched a security crackdown on illegal immigration in the run up to the tournament, citing fears of terrorist attacks. In the past week they have detained near 400 illegal aliens, most of them beggars from neighbouring Cambodia. Nearly 10,000 athletes and officials from 41 countries are registered for the games being held in Bangkok from Dec. 6-20.

French police arrest 22 in crackdown on smugglers

PARIS (R) — French police arrested 22 people Wednesday during a crackdown against a ring of smugglers bringing illegal immigrants into France and Britain, a police spokesman said. Among those arrested were five illegal immigrants, the spokesman added. Documents and cash were seized. Police said they expected more developments in the case both in Germany, through where many illegal immigrants transited, as well as in Britain. Police said the ring was based in Colombo and charged the equivalent of up to 50,000 francs (\$9,000) to smuggle people into France with a further 10,000 francs (\$1,800) if they wished to continue to Britain. The illegals travelled via Yugoslavia, Austria and Italy, or Britain, the spokesman said. Several hundred people successfully used the route in the past few years, travelling by plane or lorry, the spokesman said.

Myanmar denies ignoring HIV/AIDS

BANGKOK (R) — Myanmar's military government denied Wednesday that it was ignoring the problem of HIV and AIDS, saying it had organised a range of measures to prevent and control the spread of the disease.

Responding to recent criticism by United Nations agencies that it had no "serious" programmes to combat the human immunodeficiency virus or help people with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, the government said it had observed World AIDS Day on Dec. 1.

It said the country had a series of educational programmes to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS and had organised speeches and a workshop on the problem.

"It is surprising to note that some of the Western media have wrongly reported that the government commitment to fight the narcotic and HIV/AIDS problem in the country is not enough," the government said in a statement.

By last year, according to UNICEF, some 15,000 children in Myanmar — population 47 million — had been orphaned by AIDS and the country had a "very high" rate

of HIV infection, affecting between one and 2.4 per cent of the adult population.

Other NGO officials have said Myanmar is in a state of "denial" over HIV and AIDS and has taken few of the steps needed to stop the disease from spreading, such as distributing condoms or screening blood.

Widespread intravenous drug abuse means the virus could soon reach epidemic proportions, they say. But the Myanmar government said Wednesday it had taken many positive steps to combat the problem, including providing counselling services.

"Efforts are well under way to ensure universal blood safety," it said.

"Considering the fact that people with STD (sexually transmitted disease) infection are more prone to get HIV infection, STD teams have been strengthened throughout the country."

The government statement said Myanmar Health Minister Saw Tun gave a speech to Yangon's International Business Centre Tuesday to mark World AIDS Day, explaining the efforts the country had made to fight the problem.

Duma mulls restoring secret police statue

MOSCOW (R) — Russia Communist-dominated state Duma Lower House of Parliament voted Wednesday to debate restoring a monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the feared Soviet secret police whose statue was toppled in 1991.

Dzerzhinsky, known as Iron Felix, founded the Bolshevik secret police which involved into the KGB, torturing and imprisoning dissidents and maintaining a vast network labour camps in which millions died.

His statue, in front of the KGB headquarters, was toppled by jubilant crowds in 1991 after a failed coup by Communist hardliners.

The statue's fall, widely filmed and photographed, was considered a major watershed marking the end of 70 years of totalitarian Soviet rule.

But Nikolai Kharitonov, leader of the communist-allied Agrarian Party, told the Duma Wednesday it should be restored a "symbol of the struggle against crime and corruption."

The Duma voted 246-50 in favour of placing the motion on the agenda for later discussion.

The issue of crime has come increasingly into the political limelight since the assassination of liberal Duma deputy Galina Starovoitova last month. Communist and their allies have called for harsh emergency security measures.

But liberals oppose new draconian laws and accuse Communists of hijacking the death of an outspoken democrat to push their illiberal agenda.



Taiwan's Green Party candidate Kao Chen-Yen, running for the Dec. 5 parliamentary election, fires what he called a "water bomb" during a campaign rally in Taipei. Kao said the "water bomb" represents a missile fired by Taiwan's arch-rival China against the island. Kao, whose party opposes the building of nuclear power plants, said if he was elected, he would do all he could to stop authorities from building new nuclear power plants (Reuters photo)

Ethnicity debate fades from Taiwan election races

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan's elections are known for their noise, colour, the zany lengths candidates will go to — and this year a conspicuous lack of volatile ethnic tension.

In earlier campaigns, street clashes were not uncommon between "waishengren" — literally "outlanders," or the million-plus mainlanders who flooded Taiwan at the close of China's civil war in 1949 — and Taiwanese, whose families have called the island home for centuries.

Political debate often was split along ethnic lines.

The Democratic Progressive Party, founded by local Taiwanese in defiance of martial law during Taiwan's authoritarian era, embodied Taiwanese dreams of final independence from China.

The ruling Nationalist Party represented those who longed for an end to Taiwan's half-century of estrangement from China — mostly mainlanders.

Today things are not so tidy.

As Taiwan prepares to elect a new parliament and mayors for Taipei and

Kaohsiung Saturday, both major parties are generally steering clear of the explosive ethnicity issue in hopes of gaining votes in the political mainstream.

"Taiwan first! Taipei first!" is the campaign call of Taipei mayoral challenger Ma Ying-Jeou, an ethnic mainlanders who hopes to win the capital back for the Nationalists from incumbent Chen Shui-Bian, a Democratic Progressive and ethnic Taiwanese.

Chen came under attack early on for suggesting Ma favoured China — in effect questioning his loyalty to Taiwan — and has been backsliding ever since, keen for support from the 30 per cent of capital residents with mainland roots.

As Taiwan's democracy has matured, both parties have shifted to centrist — some say undistinguishable — platforms favouring the status quo in which it enjoys de facto independence but puts off moves towards formal independence or union with China.

Tsai Nien-Chung, head of the media department at the World College of

Journalism, said the ruling party had no choice but to broaden its policies to appeal across the ethnic divide.

"If candidates didn't show any affinity for the grass-roots culture of Taiwan, voters would think that they were leaning towards reunification with China. That would cost them votes."

The old Taiwanese-mainland polarisation, while not dead, has eased with time as memories of the Chinese civil war and of Taiwan's 50-year occupation by imperial Japan fade.

The great majority of Taiwan's 21 million people were born after the 1940s war that left the mainland in Communist hands and forced the Nationalist-led Republic of China government onto Taiwan.

Regardless of their parentage, most young people are adept in two dialects of Chinese — the official Mandarin that is universal on the mainland, and the local Minnan tongue.

Supporters say Ma, born in Hong Kong in 1950 during his parents' flight from China, is identified with this younger, less-divided gener-

ation of Taiwanese and his "Taiwan first" motto finds few detractors across the political spectrum.

"We are talking about Taiwan's competitiveness in international society, not just ethnic divisions or cross-strait tensions," said Ma's campaign strategist King Pu-Tsung.

"Taiwan First is more about putting Taiwan's interests first when you negotiate with China."

Incumbent Chen's Democratic Progressives, meanwhile, found in previous elections that bold appeals for a Republic of Taiwan were alienating some voters who feared this would spark conflict with China — at the expense of Taiwan's livelihood.

Hsiao Bi-Khim, head of the opposition party's International Affairs Department, says the Democratic Progressive understand they need support from Taiwanese as well as mainlanders.

"We're not going to throw the mainlanders out and we are not going to institute any policy that is going to put them in a difficult situation," said Hsiao.

N. Korea slams U.S. over suspected nuclear site

TOKYO (R) — North Korea Wednesday bitterly accused the United States of taking a hardline stance over Pyongyang's suspected nuclear site and said Washington was pushing the situation to the "brink of war."

"Now that the U.S. imperialists, having thrown off the mask of dialogue and negotiation, are bringing the situation to the brink of war, we solemnly declare... that our revolutionary armed forces will never pardon the challenge of the U.S. imperialist aggression forces but answer it with an annihilating blow," said a spokesman for the General Staff of the North Korean People's Army (KPA).

In a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) monitored in Tokyo, the North Korean spokesman said Pyongyang was ready to respond to any attacks by the United States.

"We have our own operation plan. It must be clearly known that there is no limit to the strike of our People's Army and that on this plan there is no room for escaping the strike," the North Korean military spokesman said.

Tensions have grown along the last cold war frontier since North

Korea's Aug. 31 missile test over Japan and its refusal to grant access to what Washington suspects is a possible underground nuclear site near Yongbyon, where a Soviet-era nuclear power plant has been mothballed under a 1994 agreement between North Korea and the United States.

"Nowadays, the U.S. imperialists are loudly crying that tensions have been heightened owing to the DPRK (North Korea's) 'underground nuclear facility' and its launch of an artificial satellite," the North Korean spokesman said.

"What they seek in this is to find a pretext to ignite the train of war," he said.

A U.S. official visited North Korea last month but failed to persuade Pyongyang to allow an inspection of a suspected underground nuclear site. U.S. officials said they rejected a demand for \$300 million in "reparations" to visit the site.

The United States says failure to secure access to the site could jeopardise the 1994 nuclear accord under which Washington agreed to provide Pyongyang with two advanced nuclear reactors and alternative energy supplies in return for the

North's freezing of its nuclear programme.

During his visit to South Korea last month, U.S. President Bill Clinton urged Pyongyang to abandon its efforts to develop ballistic missiles and chemical and biological weapons and warned it not to underestimate the U.S. commitment to South Korea.

The North Korean military spokesman also issued a stern warning on Wednesday that it was not only the United States but also rival South Korea and Japan that could be the targets of North Korean attacks.

"It must also be realised that the target of our strike in the war is not only the U.S. imperialist aggression forces... but also the South Korean puppets who are willing to serve as their bullet-shield and Japan and all others that offer bases or act as servants behind the scenes," the spokesman said.

"We neither want nor avoid a war. If a war is imposed, we will never miss the opportunity," he said.

"To answer fire with fire is a character of our revolutionary army and its unique mode of counteraction," he added.

North Korea issued the

statement hours after a Japanese government spokesman said Tokyo had intelligence reports that Pyongyang might be preparing for the possible launch of another ballistic missile.

Asked whether Japan had information that North Korea could test-fire another missile soon, Akitaka Saiki, deputy spokesman for Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, said: "We do have some intelligence reports about such movements on that part of the Korean peninsula."

He said, however, that it was not clear when the Stalinist state could move ahead with a fresh round of test-firing of its missiles.

Earlier Wednesday, the Yonhiji Shinbun newspaper reported that Tokyo had been warned by the United States that North Korea may test-fire another missile, perhaps before the end of this year.

Reclusive North Korea launched what Japan believes was a long-range ballistic missile on Aug. 31 which flew over northern Japan.

North Korea has steadfastly maintained that what it launched was a rocket used to "successfully" put a satellite into orbit.

OSCE chief faults big powers over Kosovo

OSLO (R) — The head of a 54-nation group sending 2,000 observers to the battered Serbian province of Kosovo accused big powers Wednesday of ignoring his urgent warnings before a Serbian crackdown.

Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek, chairing a meeting of the 54-nation Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), also said ethnic Albanians in Kosovo should have been involved in talks on a shaky truce.

"At the outset, our chairmanship envisioned an increased OSCE role in early warning, conflict prevention and crisis management," he said in an opening speech to foreign ministers at the two-day talks in a tightly-guarded Oslo hotel.

"In the case of early warning, not everything went as well as it could have. First signals from the Polish chairmanship in January

that there was an urgent need to approach the problem in Kosovo unfortunately have not been met with a positive response from the big partners," he said.

Months of fighting between ethnic Albanian guerrillas and Serbian security forces killed at least 1,000 people this year and forced some 250,000 from their homes.

Relief agencies believe about 75,000 have now gone home after Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic agreed to pull back his forces from the province after threats of NATO air strikes.

Of the major powers, only Russia, France and Germany are sending foreign ministers to the talks by the OSCE, which is seeking a wider role after the cold war. Other major powers are represented at more junior level.

Geremek said it was "nec-

essary to strengthen the early warning system and its credibility." The OSCE comprises North American, European and states of the former Soviet Union from Vladivostok to Vancouver.

The OSCE is building a 2,000 strong group of observers to monitor a U.S.-brokered truce signed by Milosevic in October. About 400 have so far been deployed with the rest due by the end of January.

Geremek also said that "I have not hidden my reservations that the representatives of the Albanian population of Kosovo have not been a part to the negotiated agreement. I maintained contacts with all interested parties."

"The Kosovo verification mission, unprecedented for the OSCE both in scope and risks, involved, is currently the single largest challenge for the organisation," he said.

Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik defended the OSCE often overshadowed by NATO and the United Nations, from charges that it had been too slow, in organising the observers. Norway will chair the OSCE in 1999.

"The OSCE has been criticised for being slow in establishing the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM)," Bondevik said in a speech. "However, we must not forget that the KVM is by far the biggest and most complex field operation in the OSCE's history."

Geremek, in a wide-ranging speech with a strong moral and philosophical tone, expressed hopes that trends towards greater nationalism, such as in ex-communist nations, could be balanced with trends towards integration, as in the European Union.

India kicks off major desert war games

UTARLAI, India (R) — The rumble of the tanks and the roar of fighter jets has returned to India's western Rajasthan state, seven months after a stunning series of nuclear explosions were conducted beneath the sandy wastes.

Nearly 100,000 Indian soldiers in full battle gear began a new set of desert war games Tuesday night, some 150 kilometres away from the border with arch-rival Pakistan.

"This is de jure, de facto a routine triennial military exercise," said Lt. General H.M. Khanna as he sat in a camouflaged enclosure deep in the Thar desert commanding his troops in a mock air-land battle.

Overhead fighter jets, including the Indian Air Force's newly acquired Russian-made Su-30s, screamed past in a mock assault on enemy territory.

"No shooting is going to take place, but we are trying to simulate as close a battle as possible," said Air Marshal S. Krishnaswamy, commanding the air exercises.

Military commanders pour over pictures of deployment of troops provided by Indian Earth-imaging satellites.

"We are bringing a large number of force multipliers for the first time, the IAF (Indian Air Force) participation is perhaps the biggest ever in an army exercise," Khanna said.

Over a hundred combat aircraft, new tanks, reconnaissance vehicles and the surface-to-surface Prithvi missile were being deployed in the manoeuvres that involve a mock eight-day battle between "Red Land" and "Blue Land."

If the May series of nuclear explosions were condemned "Shakti", the biggest military exercises in three years this

December have been named "Shiv Shakti" after the Hindu god of strength.

"Pokhran may be the backdrop, but as far as we are concerned a nuclear conflict is more in the mind, less on the ground," the army commander said referring to the nuclear blasts in Pokhran.

If anything, the balance of nuclear terror on the subcontinent had only increased the relevance of conventional forces, Khanna argued.

India's nuclear explosions were followed by a similar series by Pakistan, analysts said.

Tensions have risen on the subcontinent since the nuclear blasts and tentative attempts to resume dialogue between the neighbours have made little headway.

Plans of the Indian exercises in the Rajasthan desert which follow manoeuvres over the Arabian sea last month drew sharp comment from Pakistan which said the manoeuvres were timed to make the atmosphere worse just when the neighbours had made tentative attempts to resume dialogue.

But Khanna said the Indian combat exercises were transparent and Pakistan had been informed weeks in advance. "We have been transparent, we have informed them much in advance," he said.

In 1987 first India and then Pakistan carried out large-scale military manoeuvres close to the border, raising the spectre of a fourth war between them.

The two neighbours have fought three wars, two of them over the disputed territory of Kashmir, since the partition and independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

'Tamil rebels delay Sri Lanka war solution'

COLOMBO (R) — Sri Lanka's ethnic war has continued mainly due to the refusal by Tamil Tiger rebels to negotiate a political solution to the conflict, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said in a report Wednesday.

"As long as the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) remains implacable in its refusal to accept any political solution short of a separate state and engages in armed violence to support its position, it is difficult to end the conflict situation," the agency's National Human Development Report on Sri Lanka said.

The LTTE have been fighting government troops for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983.

The report said it was important for a broad consensus on a political solution to the conflict among the people of the country, including the government and other political parties.

"The devolution proposals of the government, which envisage extensive devolution of power to regions, may form a basis for a political solution to the secessionist conflict," the report said.

"However, the LTTE has not shown itself willing to accept a political solution. Instead, it has insisted on obtaining a separate 'Eelam State'."

The devolution proposals of the ruling People's Alliance are currently stuck in parliament for want of a two-thirds majority vote.

The main opposition United National Party has declined to help the government push through the constitutional reforms, saying it was necessary to strengthen the centre, rather than give more powers to the regions.

The UNDP report said the LTTE had deliberately targeted institutions in areas outside the north-eastern provinces.

"These attacks appear to be aimed at weakening the economy of the country by destroying assets and infrastructure, deterring foreign investment and harming tourism," the report said.

It said it was important for expatriate Tamils, international governments and diplomatic circles to exert pressure on the rebels to cease violence and negotiate a political settlement rather than "insist on a separate state."

The leader of the LTTE said last week he was willing to hold initial talks with the government to create a climate of goodwill before entering into formal peace negotiations.

"We want political negotiations to be held in an atmosphere of peace and normalcy, free from the conditions of war, military aggression and economic blockade," Vellupillai Prabhakaran said in a speech to mark the end of Heroes' Week commemorating rebels killed in the war against government troops.

"We are prepared to engage in initial talks to discuss the removal of such pressures and to work out a basic framework for political negotiations," he added.

The government is yet to formally respond to Prabhakaran's speech, but the state-owned Sunday Observer quoted officials as saying that "given the fluid situation of the conflict the government needed to be flexible in its stance."

Sri Lankan troops are in the 17th month of their campaign to wrest control of a key northern highway from the rebels, which has claimed thousands of lives on both sides.

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Seeds for tolerance, harmony

THE AGREEMENT concluded last week between the Ministry of Education and the Council of Christian Bishops to offer Christian education classes at public schools as of this month is a commendable achievement.

It was only logical that Christians, who have been a driving force in the building of the Kingdom, were given the right to learn about their religion not only at private schools but also at state-run elementary and secondary schools.

As highlighted on many occasions and in various writings by the Kingdom's leadership, Christian Jordanians have historically provided a precious link with the Western world, with which they share their religion.

But the recent agreement on teaching Christianity at public schools also provides an additional example of Jordan's resolve not only to grant minorities their internationally-recognised rights, but also to actively promote, uphold and support — even financially — the exercise of such rights.

The government's commitment to meet the extra cost for Christian education classes reflects the high degree of religious tolerance in the Kingdom.

HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, has long spearheaded a campaign for inter-faith dialogue on a global basis.

His untiring efforts, which have granted Jordan recognition and praise worldwide, have stemmed from the firm belief that dialogue, pluralism, respect for diversity, cooperation, and tolerance are the keys to progress in all spheres.

What better place than our own country to implement these principles on the ground, thus providing an example for this and other regions in the world?

We look forward to a country where, in addition to Islam and Christianity, our children will also be able to learn about all great religions of the world, thus widening their horizons to include all human experiences.

Different civilisations have given different answers to the most profound human questions on life and death, the essence of mankind and our universe. But in each and every of these answers there is a little of each and every one of us, as we are all part of the same humanity.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said that for the first time in their modern history, Arabs have succeeded to establish their own real media pluralism. He said this achievement has helped put every Arab country's problem in focus. As CNN is considered an effective factor in globalisation, so the Arab satellite stations form an essential role in Pan-Arabism, said the writer. These stations enjoy a high-standard of quality and are seen to be very credible, unlike certain sectors of the Israeli media, for example. Fanek said any survey would find that Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Oman, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen and Libya have a stronger media presence than Israel. Israel cannot win the battle of communication against Arabs, Fanek claimed.

Al Dustour's editorial said the international powers have renewed their commitment to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, and affirmed their willingness to politically and economically support the developing Palestinian state at a recent meeting in Washington. The paper said that they promised to provide \$3 billion to the Palestinian National Authority over the next five years. With this move, the international community has expressed its support for a comprehensive, sustainable and just peace, in the face of stubborn Israeli policies, claimed the paper, which added that such policies, for e.g. permitting the construction of 480 residential units in occupied territory, and Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon's cancellation of two agreements with the Palestinians, will worsen the situation and hinder the peace process in the whole region. However, Jordan will always stand by its principles to support the Palestinians and their national authority, under the direction of His Majesty King Hussein, and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, said the paper.

The FPU and stemming the tide of abuse

LIKE THE many other projects initiated and patronised by HRH Crown Prince Hassan (and supervised by some of his most able, most devoted staff members), the newly established Family Protection Unit (FPU) came to fill a crucial gap. Like many such projects, the FPU is an example of sound vision and genuine human concern translated into tangible reality.

I had the honour a few days ago to visit the said centre, and I was touched, heartened and impressed. I was touched because the cases which the unit deals with are touching, to say the least: victims of sexual and physical abuse (primarily helpless women and children). Many of us, if not most, live ordinary, normal, safe, secure, and protected lives; our paths (unless we make it a point to open our eyes) rarely cross those of the less fortunate among us. As mad urban centres and ugly apartment-buildings expand, we find ourselves increasingly living in isolated/isolating nutshells.

I was heartened, because something sincere is being done to tackle a problem to which society has either turned its back for a long time or dealt with somewhat

offhandedly and haphazardly. Victims of abuse suffer doubly, if not triply or quadruply: the first time when the evil act of abuse falls upon them; the second when nobody extends the hand of help to them and they are left to suffer alone; the third when they are shamed for what they have no wilful part in or understanding of; the fourth when they lose their self-esteem as a result of the feeling of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness. A person in trouble needs, more than anything else, help: physiological and psychological. The unit provides them with both.

I was impressed because the unit is a quality unit, not so much because it has ultra-modern equipment (it does not) but because of the quality of the people working in it or supervising it: their enthusiasm, their desire to serve, their training, and their warmth.

The rooms where the patients (I prefer the term "patient" to "victim") are received are quite nice; the one which has been prepared to receive children resembles a nice kindergarten classroom with bright colours and beautiful toys. Such pleasant physical setting is important — I would, in fact, say cru-

cial. The problem with many state-run service institutions in our society (including health clinics and centres) is that they are physically — excuse my language — repulsive. Some of our health clinics and hospitals look ugly and depressing, much like prisons and slaughterhouses. It is so important for a patient to receive treatment at a nice place. The FPU is humble, but it is nice.

While the idea of the Unit came into being in 1995, the Unit itself became operational (after a process of careful preparation, consultation, and training in which the British Lancashire Constabulary played a vital part) in February 1998. Since its inauguration, the Unit has dealt with 290 cases, 155 of which are child abuse cases.

In addition to offering medical and psychological treatment to the victims, the Unit — in close coordination with the Public Security Department (PSD) — handles the abusers or victimisers themselves, offering professional advice and counselling to some and referring others to courts. But the Unit also plays an important role in spreading awareness about abuse. There is a lot to be done in relation to physi-

cal abuse, in particular. In a culture in which some (maybe many) parents, husbands or brothers think hitting or beating children, wives or sisters is OK, much awareness is needed. One motto among some old-fashioned parents (ironically inherited from teachers) has been (and it still does exist in some circles): If you hit, hit hard. Though the Unit does not deal with cases of domestic violence, it realises, and makes clear in its awareness campaigns, that a thin line separates what might be considered harmless hitting or beating and actual abuse. Hitting or beating, no matter what form it takes, is (the Unit aims to demonstrate in such campaigns) against our customs, traditions and religion. Those who resort to such deviant behaviours of hitting or beating and attempt to justify it by quoting (out of context) certain slogans or sayings from our culture are grossly misinterpreting. Through its awareness campaign the Unit aims to deconstruct such harmful constructs.

The work now done by the Unit used to be done by the police centres. That was not effective, for police centres (no matter how diligent and

View from Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

willing to help) were neither qualified for the task nor able to focus on the specific matter of abuse, for they had to deal with a myriad of other problems. The neatness in the Unit lies in the fact that it is established with the aim of focusing on the problem of abuse only, and on nothing else.

What I like about the Unit, among other things, is the nice balance in its approach between caution and courage. Its caution is reflected in its awareness of the cultural context within which it is functioning. It knows well when to interfere

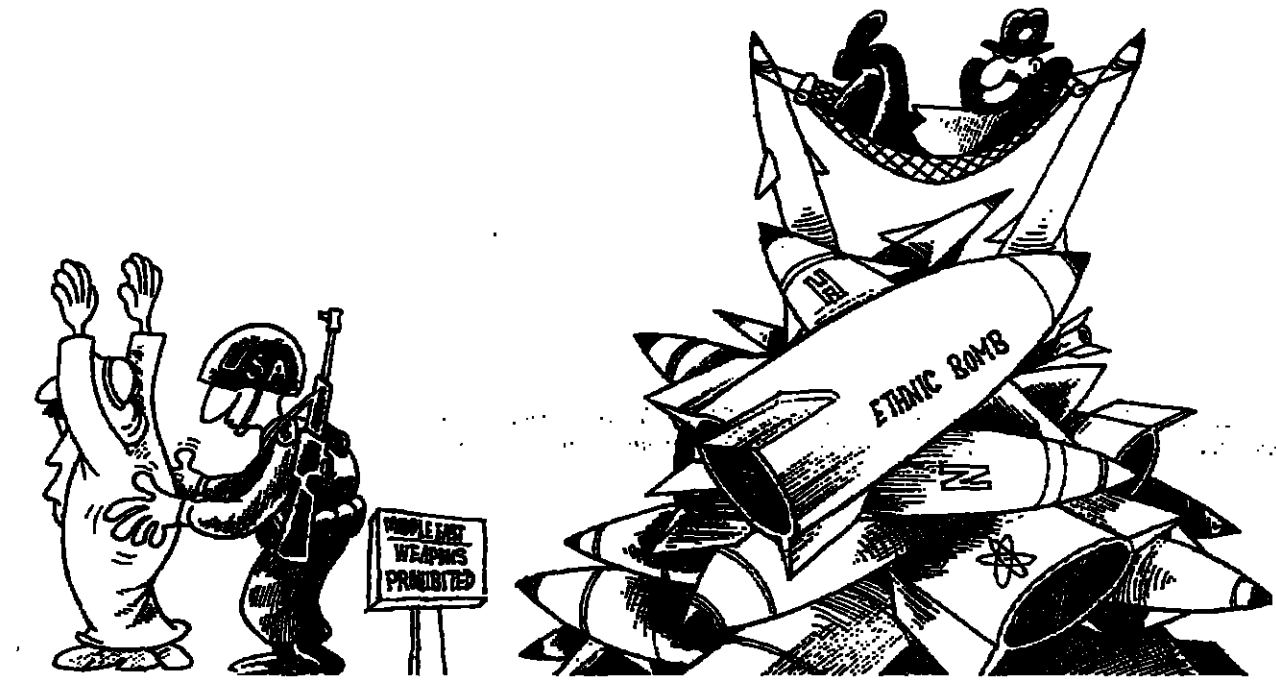
and when not to. The line separating disciplinary punishment on the part of parents, for example, from abuse is a thin one. The Unit sees the line clearly. It does not cross its limits.

But the minute the welfare of the child is at stake, and the minute abuse is detected, it steps in unhesitatingly. "Even in cases of mild abuse, several parents have stopped beating their children the minute we rang the doorbell and paid them a visit. Our mere presence was enough to convey the message to parents that we mean business," an FPU official has put.

The FPU works closely not only with the PSD but also with a number of other governmental and non-governmental organisations, including the Ministry of Social Development, (which offers financial assistance and welfare to some of the patients), the Ministry of Health, and many others.

The FPU, which plans to open branches in other towns and cities when it is in a position to do so effectively, is something to be proud of. It deserves our support. To chip in or to report cases of obvious abuse, call: 56233458 or fax: 56233459.

M. KAHIL



Developing

What goes up...

CAIRO — Like its counterparts in the rest of the region, Egypt's bourse continues to slump. In Cairo this week to work on the traditionally thorny question of Egyptian import procedures, gloom predominates among economists and businesspeople. Though acknowledging macro-economic stabilisation and some reform, they were not cheered by many indicators — such as a stock exchange where share prices continue to fall. The trade regulations I was looking at had become more user-friendly over the past few years, along with other government rules that are steadily being simplified. This is a good thing, but by itself such reform — though necessary — is not sufficient to keep an economy moving forward. Higher growth is needed for the market to reverse course.

Meanwhile, Egyptian shares have been caught in a downward spiral. A showcase of the country's shift to a market economy after the socialism of the Nasser era. Egypt's bourse had enjoyed a boom till the spring of last year. A host of reasons can be cited for the market's doldrums, but the financial turmoil in Asia — the contagion factor — is probably not one of them, at least not directly. More relevant are lower oil prices and weaker regional and international markets for Egyptian goods and services. Thus, Egypt's macro-economic performance, though still reasonably good compared to others in the Middle East, has been dented.

However, though it is difficult to put much of the blame for the Egyptian stock slump

on the impact of the turmoil in emerging economies, there has been some flight of foreign funds as part of international investors' moves to reduce exposure in emerging markets worldwide. Around a fifth of customers in the Cairo bourse for the first half of 1998 were foreign investors, but among them buyers continue to be outnumbered by sellers.

Though more buyers had been there in June 1996, foreign players then still accounted for roughly the same twenty per cent of the value of transactions. In other words, this indicator of international interest in Egypt has not moved over the past couple of years, though foreigners' transactions were a mere eight per cent in March 1996. In the heady days of that year's boom, no less than 125 overseas financial institutions were participating in the market. Many of these are now holding back. There is no mass exodus of foreign funds, as happened in Russia and other contagion-plagued markets in the past year or so, but there has certainly not been an influx of fresh money.

By mid-1996, the number of listed companies had grown to 680; but, the Cairo market today only includes 700 stocks, another indication that things are not moving forward with any great speed. Market capitalisation has also stagnated over the past year and a half: with GDP rising, this means that the ratio of the size of the market to the volume of national output has been falling. Market capitalisation had risen from around three

billion dollars in 1992 to over eleven billion by late 1996. However, even the latter figure was only around one sixth of GDP, witness to the potential for more enterprises to seek finance from the market and for investors to increase their stock holdings. (The comparable ratio in Amman is around 100 per cent.)

In all this, we should remember that the Cairo bourse in its present incarnation really is new. It was only the government's enactment of the Capital Market Law in 1992 that restored domestic and overseas interest in Egyptian shares. Since then, the market has gone through four distinct phases:

During the first (early 1993 to October 1994) it was on the rise as a result of some companies' increased profits, a drop in interest rates, and dividend income becoming tax exempt.

The second phase (November 1994 to August 1995) was one of correction, characterised by depressed prices and a decline in daily trading volumes. Among the reasons behind the drop were the inexperience of individual local investors who are yield-driven and the lack of sufficient institutional traders who are more sensitive to earnings growth and capital gains.

foreign institutions in Egypt. International fund managers had discovered Cairo as far as portfolio investment was concerned. Egypt's allowing foreign intermediaries to operate on the same basis as national firms, with no limitations on capital mobility or restrictions on foreign transactions, was also a factor in putting the country higher on the list of emerging markets to be looked at positively.

However, by the spring of 1997 the Cairo bourse had cooled down, and phase four — which continues till today — had begun. The trouble in Asian and other emerging markets thus came later than the beginning of the current share slump in Cairo, but prices now are still around half what they were during the peak days of early last year. Though some shares are earning twelve per cent, several points above what an Egyptian can get on a bank deposit, other companies have seen their stock fall by up to seventy per cent since the 1997 Winter of Contentment.

Paradoxically, the putting on the market now of large chunks of privatised shares could actually move things upward. Usually, new stock on most bourses tend to depress prices of existing shares, for the obvious reason that the latter may temporarily be less attractive than their nascent competitors. In the case of Cairo, however, offerings by the government of lots of shares in the right companies on the right terms will boost the market. This would be the start of "phase five," and the final nail in the coffin of Egyptian socialism.

Blacklisted

ISMAEL HABASH has always wanted to work in television, even when he was young and growing up in Gaza. In 1993 he took his first course in television filming and production, and his dream of working in television became a reality when he was hired to work for Palestine TV in Ramallah. His stint at the official Palestinian station didn't last long, but Ismael has kept on working as a freelance television producer and director. He also worked with a number of human rights organisations as a field researcher.

A few weeks ago he was chosen to participate in a joint Palestinian-Jordanian-Israeli training programme, funded by the Danish government, begins with a three-week training in a remote Danish location. It is to be followed up early next year with each party producing programmes about their community. The segments from all three sides are to be shown on Jordan TV, Israel Educational Television and Al Quds Educational Television.

Ismael was excited about being able to go to Denmark and to participate in the project. He applied for an exit visa, but his request was denied. He asked again through a human rights organisation, and again he was turned away. The Danish embassy in Israel got involved, and they contacted their Israeli counterparts. They were told that he could travel to Denmark, but only via Egypt and not from the Lod airport. This would have been OK, if Ismael was in Gaza. But for the past few years Ismael has been living in Ramallah with his wife and child. To go to Gaza would be a problem. The free passage road between Gaza and the West Bank has not yet been opened. Therefore every Gazan returning from the West Bank must pass through a special gate in which his magnetic card is recorded. If his permit is delayed, as is the case with Ismael, he will be detained and more importantly, he will be denied a new permit. This would create a problem for him since his family and his work is in Ramallah.

Finally, Ismael decided to try and solve his problem through the Israeli courts. Through a lawyer he applied to the Israeli high court and provided documents to show that he was officially invited to Denmark, his passport was valid and his return ticket had already been purchased. The court heard his case, but didn't make a ruling and instead kept delaying the case. At one time the Israeli legal advisor suggested that Ismael leave from the new Gaza Airport. The airport which has been officially opened has not begun commercial flights yet. By the time these start, the three week training programme in Denmark will be finished.

Ismael's case is common for Palestinians. Every time they ask for a permit they run into the fact that somehow their name is on the security services blacklist. The moment the person's ID number is entered into the computer the name flashes as a "security" threat and the permit is denied.

The problem is that no one knows how names are placed on the security services computer and

Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kuttub

worse yet, how they can be removed.

Your name can be put on this list if you have ever been accused of a security infraction, if you have been suspected of being involved in a breach of security, if a collaborator has given your name as a suspect or if you are related to someone who fits the above. Nahed Awad, a young woman from Beit Sahour is sure her name is on the blacklist, because her brother was active in the infidels. Ironically, her brother has succeeded in removing his name from the blacklist, but every time Nahed is denied permission to go to Israel. Nahed, who works in the media, is also routinely denied an Israeli government press card. But when she applied for an exit visa from the Lod airport to go to Denmark, her request was allowed and she was given a six-hour permit to enter Israel in order to reach the airport.

Dealing with the blacklist is like shadowboxing, there is no one to make contact with. If you try to find out how your name can be removed from the computer list you run into a brick wall. Some people say that to get your name removed you need to submit an istisna — a kind of request for citizenship.

For the past four weeks, 20 Palestinian journalists have been taking a course in Hebrew at the Israeli Government Press office in Jerusalem. While all the participants in this conference have proper press credentials and are not on the blacklist, they are not allowed to drive their cars to Jerusalem. They have to drive up to the checkpoint, park their cars and take taxis to reach West Jerusalem. This Sunday these journalists are going to Netanya for a two-day intensive Hebrew seminar. Yehia Abumawad wrote a one page article about the issue saying that: one day these Palestinian journalists will be able to interview Netanyahu in Hebrew. The problem is that 13 of the 20 Palestinian journalists who will go to the Ulpan Akiva this weekend are from the West Bank, and therefore by law not allowed to stay overnight in Israel. So, these Palestinians attending a training programme paid for by the Israeli government will be breaking Israeli law, and they know it.

Ismael and the journalists studying Hebrew are politically moderate and are supportive of the peace process. If these media people are not allowed the basic freedom of travel, what can others expect? It is time to end these apartheid laws and allow Palestinians to travel freely.

Careful

By Robert C

EVER FEEL that the more you want to know about the world, the more you need to be careful? That's the message of a new book, "Careful: How to Stay Safe in a Dangerous World," by Robert C. ...

As it turns out, there may be more to this book than meets the eye. The book is not just a collection of tips and tricks, but a comprehensive guide to staying safe in a world that is becoming increasingly dangerous. ...

NASA K

By Steve Farrar

IT WILL, hold on where no one is called before. The American space agency NASA is drawing on the Space Age equivalent of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in California to help it make the first trip to and from the planet Mars. ...

Society on the move

Prince Edward's reception, a few send-offs, and yet 'an otter' award

ZAHARAN STREET on Monday evening was a flurry of activity as guests poured into the residence of the British ambassador to meet HRH Prince Edward of Britain, here in Amman on a short visit. Welcoming guests and introducing them to Prince Edward was Ambassador Christopher Battiscombe and his wife Bridget. Those in attendance included TRH Prince Ali Bin Nayef and Princess Wijdan Ali, former prime ministers Zeid Rifai (current president of the Senate), Abdul Salam Majali and Abdul Karim Kabariti and his wife Fatima, Minister of Public Works and Transport Nasser Lawzi, Minister of Information Nasser Judeh, Minister of Planning Nabil Ammari, former ambassador to the U.K. Albert Buroos and his wife Kazi, Jordan Press Foundation Chairman Abdul Salam Jarawneh and Ad Dostour Chief Editor Dr. Nabil Sharif. When questioned about portraits hanging at his residence, Mr. Battiscombe said that one of the paintings was a portrait of his great-great-grandfather who had been the physician of Prince Edward's great-great-grandfather, but in the circumstances of the evening he had forgotten to mention it to the prince.

Karen Asfour. Any exhibition of this sort would be incomplete without the contributions of Widad Kawar, who, although not attending this time, is providing the traditional costumes jewelry, and accessories from her world famous collection.

While in Washington, Princess Sarvath will present a lecture on "Women in Islam" at Johns Hopkins University, and will hold a talk on the education of women in the Muslim World at the American Enterprise Institute.

JUST CAUSE: The government has nominated former Royal Court Chief Dr. Awn Khasawneh for the position of judge at the International Court of Justice. The ICJ is the judicial organ of the United Nations that adjudicates contentious disputes between states and it renders advisory opinions to the U.N. organs. It is composed of 15 judges who are elected for a nine-year period. The election is conducted by all member states of the United Nations. The seat of the ICJ is in the Hague, and the elections are to be held at the United Nations in 1999. Khasawneh, an expert in international law, was a member of Jordan's negotiating team with Israel during the peace talks.

MEET ME IN MANILA! The send-off partying for the head of the delegation of the European Community in Amman Yves Gazzo and his wife Nikola is about winding down. The couple's next station, as was reported earlier, will be in the Philippines. The Gazzos, who are sad to leave Jordan and the Arab World, leave behind many friends. But if their transit stop from Manila to Brussels could be made Amman, then we will at least know that they are only a skip away. Succeeding Gazzo in Jordan will be James Moran, who was most recently head of the EU delegation in Jamaica.

TO GOOD TIMES: The November and December calendars of associates and friends of German Cultural and Press Attaché Ingrid Liedgens is booked solid. Liedgens, who, having been at her post in Jordan for more than six years, certainly can claim the title "doyen of the attachés" will be sorely missed as she heads home for Germany and starts a new chapter of her life. With postings to India and Namibia and homefront assignments in protocol, Liedgens retiring from the German foreign service, but not before a sojourn through Egypt starting mid-month. Her circle in Jordan included officials, academics and people from the arts, who reluctantly have been bidding her farewell, and

are hoping that she will return often to Amman.

DEFENDERS: Jordanian Human Rights Association President Dr. Sulaiman Sweiss heads off for Paris on Monday to attend France's celebration of the 50th anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Sweiss was invited by French Minister Robert Badner, head of the ministerial committee in charge of celebrations.

Sweiss and three other Jordanians have also been invited to participate in the Human Rights Defenders' Summit in Paris also this month. Joining him there will be Najib Rashdan, Mazen Saket, and J.T. staff reporter Rana Hussein, all human rights activists. The summit will issue the Paris Declaration, which will call for governments and communities to strengthen human rights protection regulations and support human rights defenders. French President Jacques Chirac, French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, U.N. Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson and UNESCO Secretary General Federico Mayor are scheduled to take part in the Human Rights Defenders activities.

BRAY PINSTRIPE: Robert Bray was recently appointed General Manager of the British Bank in Jordan, succeeding John Pasco who served for 30 years. The Bank management hosted a farewell for Pasco on Monday evening at the InterContinental Hotel attended by clients, businesspersons and bankers.

ENVOYS GATHER: The Institute of Diplomacy, which is headed by former foreign minister Dr. Kamel Abu Jaber, is playing host to the meetings of the Former Foreign Ministers' International Council. The meetings, which started Wednesday, included a lecture entitled "Russia Today," by Council President and former Russian foreign minister Dr. Alexander Bessmertnyk, who heads the Foreign Policy Society in Moscow. Also yesterday, former Romanian foreign minister and Council Vice President Dr. Adrian Nastase spoke on "Europe and the Balkans Area." Hosting the guests to the meetings were ID Acting President HRH Princess Wijdan Ali, and later for dinner former foreign minister and chief of the Royal Court Marwan Qasem at his farm.

WINNING WORDS: In New Delhi, announcements of the winners of the Shankar International Children's Competition included



CONGRATULATIONS to our colleague and friends Chief Editor of Ad Dostour Dr. Nabil Sharif and Manal on the birth of Tarek (left) and Hashem, born on Nov. 25. The twins bring the Sharif family to five with daughters Shada, 15, Farah, 11, and Joud, 8. Can you tell which one of the boys will follow in dad's footsteps?

the name of one very talented Jordanian boy from the National Orthodox School, Yusef Ziad Shunwayhat received a letter from Ms. Yamuna Shankar last month congratulating him on his work entitled, "Defector from Hell," which won the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Gold Medal. Yusef, a 10th grader, wrote a story about Joseph who challenges the forces of darkness in order to save an innocent child's soul from torture. It is a story of the General of Hell's armies, a man who was changed into a demon and given the second most powerful position in hell, a man known once as a ruthless killer, the Champion of Hell. That's all according to young Yusef. Perhaps in a few years Yusef can try his talents on the Jordan Times features page.

AN OTTER AWARD: Taybet Zamman does us proud again. The village hotel resort has another major international award to boast about. This time it is the British Guild of Travel Writers 1998 Silver Otter Award which recognised Taybet Zamman as a highly commended "best tourism project overseas." Nomination for the award was placed by journalist and broadcaster Peter Lilley following his visit to Taybet Zamman near Petra last December. Receiving the

award at a Nov. 15 ceremony at London's Savoy Hotel was Sulaiman Tarazi, marketing and sales director for Taybet Zamman. The award was presented by British Guild of Travel Writers Chairman Gary Buchanan. Other honours paid Taybet Zamman in the last three years are the Global British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award in 1997, the Green Globe Commendation Award in 1997 and the EIBTM Greening of Business Award in 1998.

MORE SALSA NEWS: You may not recognise the name, but salsa addicts will. Edie Lewis, a.k.a. "the Salsa Freak," is the co-founder and editor in chief of SalsaWeb Magazine, the largest salsa dance website in the world. Ay Dios mio!!! She was scheduled to be in the region, not Saudi Arabia, and Rio of Salsera Studios in Amman, who also happens to be the Salsa World Magazine correspondent for Jordan, persuaded her to come give a workshop at the studio on Sunday evening and later attend a Latino Night at Etah at the Marmara Hotel. So mark your calendars red on Sunday, Amman is heading for the heat up.

Jennifer Hamarneh

Careful of the spy at work:

By Robert O'Harrow Jr.

EVER FEEL that the boss watches your work a little too closely? That your every keystroke at the computer is scrutinized? That you cannot make a move without someone looking over your shoulder?

As it turns out, there may be a reason for your office angst: More software companies are offering sophisticated tools that can keep tabs on employees.

Forget about time clocks and records of long-distance telephone calls. These new products allow the boss to know how often you visit that sport site on the World Wide Web, trade electronic mail with a pal over in accounting and play Missile Command.

The software can run on your computer at work without your knowledge.

Developers of such software make the case that workplace fraud, stolen secrets and just simple laziness cost American companies a lot of money; some estimates place the losses in the hundreds of billions of dollars. They argue that a little workplace surveillance now can head off huge problems later.

Julie Allen, senior product manager for Tech Assist Inc., said her company's software, Desktop Surveillance, might help a boss prevent a lazy employee from cruising inappropriate sites on the Web or a temporary worker from deleting important files. The programme, one of several like it on the market, costs \$55. She said a surprising array of companies, organisations and individuals have bought the software since its release this year.

Among them are the Federal Bureau of Investigation and local prosecutors, as well as mistrustful spouses who want to keep a close eye on their mates. Private investigators also have been offering it to clients.

"It's sort of like a truth metre. It tells you exactly what's happening," said Ms. Allen, adding that the software can be configured to send the boss a message whenever an employee on a company's internal network is doing something that is against the rules. "It could be any desktop activity at all."

Such monitoring is part of the growing use of technology to track employees. Business executives now routinely read employee e-mail and listen in on telephone conversations. Some companies have installed video monitors in offices, and some track the whereabouts of employees who use electronic pass keys. One company sells computer systems that allow restaurants and hospitals to track how often employees wash their hands.

All of this is legal. Many companies argue that workplace privacy is an oxymoron. When someone is using a company computer and getting paid to work, some people argue, they have no right to send private e-mail, steal trade secrets or amuse themselves by cruising the Web.

What do privacy advocates think of it? Judith DeCew, a philosophy professor at Clark University, said people cannot expect to shield themselves at work in the same way they do at home and in the rest of their lives. "Employees have less of a privacy claim," she said.

Robert Gellman, a privacy consultant in Washington, agreed. "You don't have the same status as at home," he said.



Your PC

But both said the burgeoning practice of watching workers could backfire, making employees feel less trusted and less enthusiastic about their jobs. So even though the use of this technology to monitor workers may be legal and effective, it could hurt companies in the long run.

"People say, 'Hey, if they're going to treat me that way, I'm only going to do what they ask me to do,'" said Ms. DeCew, author of "In Pursuit of Privacy: Law, Ethics and the Rise of Technology." "It will have a chilling effect."

Mr. Gellman suggests that companies should make sure they spell out for employees how they use such software and the information it gathers. But even then he is wary of the practice, saying that it is part of a lamentable tendency for people to monitor one another.

"This is all part of that," Mr. Gellman said. "At some point, surveillance becomes counterproductive."

Ever since I started using the Internet at work, I've assumed that nothing I did with it was really private. When I misused a company electronic message critiquing the judgement of one of my editors — a note that I somehow sent directly to said editor — that assumption became uncomfortably concrete.

One can only hope that as more companies adopt new methods to monitor their workers, they will do it in ways that do not undermine morale or intrude too far into their lives — and they will be sure to let their workers know.

— International Herald Tribune

Tough games

By Jean-Claude Elias

chip talk



A FEW years ago, when a good part of my professional activity was marketing PCs, potential buyers would often come and ask me for a simple machine, nothing really fancy, just good enough to play games. The argument obviously — in the mind of the buyer — was that games, contrary to business software, didn't require a fast, powerful machine.

The truth is that nothing could be more wrong. It was wrong then and it is terribly wrong now.

Modern computer games are extremely sophisticated pieces of software. It takes huge amounts of memory to run them efficiently, the most powerful processor money can buy, and the very best monitor and screen controller to enjoy the extremely realistic, sharp, high-resolution and fast moving images they can display. An energetic stereo sound system also is a must if you want to feel the "good vibrations" they can produce. PC games are definitely more demanding than your typical word processor, spreadsheet or accounting system, in terms of software and hardware requirements. It may be deceptive, hard to believe at first sight but it's true.

Though not particularly fond of such games myself, I recently tested the popular "The Need For Speed" (TNFS) in its latest version III. It is probably the best car racing game around. To list only the essential components, the machine I used was a Pentium II running at 333 MHz, with 128 MB of fast SDRAM memory, and a special Matrox Millennium display adapter fitted with 8MB of RAM to drive the

extra high-resolution 17" monitor. The sound was sent to a 200 Watts-RMS Yamaha surround system connected to 5 speakers.

The game worked beautifully and I enjoyed the amazingly realistic design of the Ferraris, Jaguar, Mercedes and other sport cars that, alas, I don't own in real life. The sound especially was stunning. TNFS, like most games, lets you adjust the resolution (the sharpness) of the screen. At low and medium resolution the cars motion is smooth and natural. But at the highest setting, the one that makes the cars so real on your screen that you feel like grabbing the driving wheel, the motion becomes slow, unnatural and broken. I was shocked at first to discover that even the powerful PC I was using was not enough.

Having investigated the matter, I found that the weak point was the Matrox display adapter. Although it is considered a high-end card, costing JD300 while cheaper models are sold at JD40, its three-dimensional capabilities were not up to the best resolution the game offers. There are display adapters that are better suited for such tasks. They are often referred to as "3D games accelerators." They are also often used in computers specialising in graphic design and display. I could not find such a card in Amman.

Notwithstanding technical details, the moral of the above is that one should not underestimate PC games. They need better-than-average equipment to run at their best, which usually leads to very expensive hardware. But if you do like PC games, the result is worth every dinar you spend.

NASA plans spaceship to sail on light waves

By Steve Farrar

IT WILL boldly sail where no ship has sailed before. The American space agency NASA is drawing up plans to make the first trip to another star on the Space Age equivalent of the tea clipper.

Scientists from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in America believe aluminium sails may be the only way to span the vast expanses of space that separate the stars. Rockets, they say, would be too slow and unable to carry the enormous amounts of fuel needed.

Instead, the unmanned ship's energy would come from a sun-powered laser, focused on the sail through an orbiting 60-mile diameter lens, to accelerate the ship to a tenth of the speed of light — 18,600 miles per second.

The fuelless craft's sails would harness the pressure exerted by light on whatever it hits. Although it would be only a small force, the absence of friction in space would cause the ship's velocity to increase steadily.

Despite its eventual speed, interstellar distances are so great that it would still take the craft 40 years to reach the sun's nearest neighbour, Alpha Centauri, 26 million miles away.

"If the human race wants to go the stars, there is just one technique that uses known physics, and this is it," said Dr. Robert Forward, a solar sail pioneer and space flight consultant who advised the JPL team.

Reaching Alpha Centauri would be every bit as significant as putting a man on the moon. A wealth of information would be revealed to help scientists tackle many of the puzzles of the universe.

Very high speeds, far in excess of anything mankind has achieved so far, would be vital if the journey is to be made within a human lifetime.

The idea was first proposed by Russian scientists in the 1920s and has been explored several times since the start of the space race. However, only now with nanotechnology that has enabled the weight of the sail to be reduced can scientists consider it

seriously for interstellar travel.

To make a beam that could cross the distance to the destination star, sunlight would have to be converted into powerful laser light and focused using a giant, orbiting lens 60 miles in diameter.

For a few years at the start and finish of the mission, this light would be aimed at the half-mile wide sail which would carry a minimal payload of micro-electronic detectors, transmitters, computers and self-repair systems embedded in its centre.

The proposal was welcomed by Dr. Richard Taylor, who as a member of a team of experts from the British Interplanetary Society made a feasibility study of a solar sail to propel an interstellar spacecraft no bigger than a beer can — dubbed "Project Heineken" as it was intended to reach the parts of the galaxy that other spacecraft could not reach.

Taylor said his group concluded five years ago that the idea was a non-runner. "We could demonstrate that it was technically possible, but

the cost would be immense."

JPL is also evaluating a proposal to use solar sails of just one metre in diameter, put forward by a British scientist, Dr. Colin Jack.

"There's no doubt solar sailing is a feasible technology and harnessing light pressure is a perfectly valid method of space craft propulsion," said Jack.

Another British scientist, Dr. Steve Temple of Cambridge, who helped

develop a more modest vessel to take part in a race to Mars in 1992, believes technical problems would make the concept useless for reaching another star. "A solar sail is an exciting and realistic way of getting around the solar system, but the idea of using it to send a piece of tin foil off to the next star leaves me rather cold," he said.

— The Sunday Times



QIZ area extension under discussion

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — Jordan and Israel have agreed to study the possibility of extending the Qualifying Industrial Zone area to Kerak and Aqaba-Eilat, a source from the Israeli embassy said yesterday.

There were very positive discussions and a positive approach to the idea of extending the QIZ to two new areas, the source said. "Pending agreement on this issue, the two sides will draft a joint letter to the United States for a final decision on any extension of the zone."

Jordanian, Palestinian and American officials met yesterday for meetings on trade between Jordan and Israel and the West Bank Palestinian self-rule territories.

The embassy source said that the meetings were taking place along two tracks: one that included the Palestinians and focuses on Jordan's trade concerns with the Palestinians and another bilateral Jordan-Israel trade with American participation.

The QIZ at Prince Hassan Industrial Estate in Irbid was

the centerpiece of bilateral talks nine days ago between Minister of Trade and Industry Mohammad Saleh Hourani and his Israeli counterpart Natan Sharansky. Sharansky accompanied Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon. Both officials met with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib and other trade-ministry officials.

During the meeting, Israel and Jordan resolved an outstanding difference on the QIZ that they hope will encourage Jordanian investment at the zone. Israel agreed to lower the required Israeli input from 11.7 per cent to eight per cent on all products except high tech goods. Israeli input in this sector has been reduced to seven per cent.

Jordan had earlier complained that the amount of Israeli input required pushed the cost of production too high for Jordanian investors and discouraged their participation at the zone.

Although Jordanian

investors have been slow to exploit the QIZ, which promises duty and quota free access to the U.S. market, foreign investors have flocked to Jordan, even from some of the most lucrative duty free industrial zones such as Jebel Ali in Dubai.

Demand for space has already forced the expansion of the QIZ by 344 dunums, which should be completed in June 1999. Head of the Industrial Estates Corporation Amer Majali recently told the Jordan Times that Jordan has applied for an additional 2,200 dunums near Mafraq and that the zone is now in the design phase.

"The embassy source said yesterday's 'quadrilateral' meeting was a preparatory meeting ahead of the visit of U.S. President Bill Clinton to the region Dec. 12-15, and that there were few further advancements on last week's trade talks between Jordan and Israel."

"Meetings [yesterday] basically were a conclusion of the last trade meetings, and to prepare the ground for President Clinton's visit," the embassy source said.

After the bilateral meetings nine days ago, Jordanian officials said that Israel had agreed to several requests made by Jordan during a meeting in mid-November of Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli trade ministers with the U.S. Secretary of Commerce in Jerusalem.

According to the officials, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Robert E. Lighthizer, agreed to the import of Jordanian goods into the U.S. market and to extend the working hours of the King Hussein Bridge by two hours. Israel also agreed to add 65 products to the A1/A2 list of goods that the Palestinians are allowed to import from Jordan and Israel.

Hourani said earlier this week that Israel further agreed to scrap the back-to-back system of transport in favor of a point-to-point system, whereby Jordanian trucks will unload at designated areas in the PNA rather than having to unload and reload at the bridge.

The Ministry of Trade estimates that Jordan's trade with the West Bank stood at JD35 million in 1997, of which only JD12.1 million were Jordanian exports to the PNA. The World Bank has identified Jordan's trade with the West Bank as a "critical" to the rejuvenation of Jordan's economy, listing in the wake of UN economic sanctions on Iraq, once the Kingdom's largest bilateral trading partner.

Saudi Arabia rules out devaluation

RIYADH (R) — Saudi Arabia's finance minister has ruled out devaluation of the riyal which had been attacked by speculators as the country confronted sharply reduced government revenue due to low oil prices.

"There are no reasons for us to devalue the riyal," Ibrahim Abdul Aziz Al Assaf, minister of finance and national economy, said in an interview with Reuters. "The basic element when we look into the value of a currency is the effective exchange rate against other currencies."

"This has not changed. So without hesitation, I categorically emphasize there is no intention to devalue the Saudi riyal because there is no economic reason to do so. The basic elements of our exchange rate policy have not changed. Such policy is conducive to predictability and stability," he emphasized.

The spot Saudi riyal usually trades in a narrow band around its peg at 3.7500 to the dollar. In August it came under pressure from foreign-based speculators who were betting on a devaluation as oil slid to what has become a 22-year record low.

Some Saudi bankers said then the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), the central bank, pumped \$1 billion into the market through the spot and swaps market to boost the currency.

The government traditionally defends the riyal through intervention rather than by increasing interest rates.

"We didn't even need that much to fend off speculation. The main reason is that the fundamentals are there and we have the means to fend off such speculative attack," Al Assaf said.

He would not say how much SAMA spent defending the riyal but government sources said the sum was \$750 million.

Analysts said the speculation, attributed to banks in Bahrain, Europe and the United States, was prompted by tighter liquidity in the Saudi banking sector caused by low oil prices.

Saudi, the world's largest oil producer and exporter, relies on oil for about 70 per cent of revenue, received in dollars.

Saudi Arabia last devalued its currency in 1986.

five years ago it ended another bout of speculation by announcing an austerity budget and declaring there would be no devaluation.

Al Assaf called the present oil price crisis the toughest since a similar slump in 1986 and 1987. "Compared to that time, this time it is a little bit sharper and more severe."

"Yet, despite the severity, we have been able to manage it," he said.

He indicated that this was because the Saudi economic base was now wider. The private sector was more active and to some extent dependency on oil, though still large, was less than during the period when oil comprised 95 per cent of budget revenues.

Nevertheless, the present crisis presented new challenges.

"One is that, at that time, we had more of a cushion to rely on. Now we don't have that cushion, therefore, we are pursuing a policy of diversifying our revenue base in order to be less dependent on oil," Al Assaf said.

Some economists project the Saudi economy will contract this year and next and post only marginal growth in 2000. Others project a turnaround in a few months. But Al Assaf said: "I have learned my lessons a long time ago and I don't project."

The government has thought to have based its 1998 budget on an oil price of around \$16 per barrel. But for most of this year Saudi crude has averaged \$10 to \$13 a barrel.

In response, it has slashed the budget by 10 per cent across the board and imposed a hiring freeze in many areas.

Al Assaf, putting the final touches to the 1999 budget said: "The fiscal situation is now challenging and will continue to be challenging next year. We are continuing our work to streamline our expenditure — a euphemistic way of saying more cuts are on the cards."

He said the kingdom was looking at new revenue sources with a view to improving the revenue base with the minimum impact on the basic needs of the population.

"We are making continuous efforts both on the expenditure side and on

the revenue side. We have to be ready for a projected low level of revenues from oil through increasing other sources of revenue," he added.

World oil prices — now running at their lowest level since 1976, are two-thirds of the price in 1996 and 1997. At present

rates of production, each \$1 change in the price of a barrel — now around \$11 — alters Saudi revenues by about \$2.5 billion.

Most economic activity in the kingdom is tied to oil, so low prices hit gross domestic product (GDP). U.S. government

figures forecast Saudi GDP will fall nearly 13 per cent this year, and show per capita GDP has fallen to \$6,100 from \$7,200 last year.

Al Assaf said the U.S. estimates were too pessimistic and he expected the impact to be less severe.

Exchange Rates

Wednesday, 02-12-98

ACCESS 4646888

CURRENCY	JORDAN	SAUDI	U.A.E.	BAHRAIN	QATAR	OMAN	YEMEN	YEMEN	YEMEN
	RIYAL	RIYAL	DIRHAM	DIRHAM	RIYAL	RIYAL	RIYAL	RIYAL	RIYAL
JORDAN DHR	1.0000	0.1887	0.1927	1.8778	1.8387	0.1944	0.2077	0.2077	0.2077
SAUDI RYAL	5.2983	1.0000	1.0212	9.9493	9.7421	1.0301	12.3683	1.0006	3.7512
U.A.E. DHR	5.1881	0.9792	1.0000	9.7425	9.5395	1.0087	12.1111	1.0776	3.6732
BAHRAIN DHR	0.5325	0.1005	0.1028	1.0000	0.9732	1.0035	1.2431	1.1106	0.3770
QATAR RYAL	5.4509	0.1025	0.1048	1.0213	1.0000	0.1057	1.2696	0.1130	0.3851
OMAN RYAL	5.1434	0.9708	0.9914	9.6584	9.4572	1.0000	12.0086	1.0883	3.8118
YEMEN RYAL	4.4284	0.8809	0.8828	8.8044	8.7877	0.8833	1.0000	0.8880	0.3033
EGYPT POUND	4.8145	0.9087	0.9280	9.0409	8.8526	0.9381	11.2390	1.0000	3.4067
LIBANON LIRA	21.4831	0.4547	4.1408	40.3416	39.5014	4.1799	50.1497	4.4621	15.2100
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2696	0.2722	2.6523	2.5971	0.2748	3.2972	0.2834	1.0000
GBRITAIN STERLING	0.8548	0.1613	0.1648	1.6051	1.5717	0.1672	1.9954	0.1775	0.6032
GERMANY MARK	2.3758	0.4484	0.4579	4.4814	4.3685	0.4819	5.5461	0.4835	1.6821
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.9492	0.3676	0.3757	3.6602	3.5840	0.3790	4.5501	0.4048	1.3500
FRANCE FRANC	7.9677	1.5038	1.5357	14.9619	14.5003	1.5491	18.5996	1.6549	5.6411
JAPAN YEN	1.7126	0.3232	0.3301	3.2159	3.1489	0.3330	3.9678	0.3957	1.2125
HOLLAND GUILDER	2.8775	0.5054	0.5151	5.0380	4.9235	0.5206	6.2504	0.5591	1.9597
SWEDEN KRONA	11.4455	2.1582	2.2081	21.4830	21.0453	2.2253	26.7185	2.3172	8.1628
ITALY LIRA	23.6315	4.4413	4.5356	44.1883	43.2679	4.5751	54.9316	4.8876	16.6020
BELGIUM FRANC	49.0395	9.2557	9.4922	92.0882	90.1701	9.5345	114.4771	10.1857	34.7200
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	2.2173	0.4185	0.4274	4.1838	4.0770	0.4311	5.1781	0.4803	1.5899
GREEK DRACHME	3.9972	0.7544	0.7704	7.5050	7.3497	0.7772	9.3308	0.8302	2.8300
CYPRUS POUND	2.8782	0.5432	0.5548	5.4049	5.2523	0.5596	6.7189	0.5976	2.0378
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	16.1775	3.1553	3.2223	31.5527	30.7389	3.2503	39.0251	3.4722	11.8388
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1630	0.4082	0.4169	4.0617	3.9771	0.4205	5.0493	0.4483	1.5314
EURO	1.2100	0.2284	0.2332	2.2722	2.2248	0.2353	2.8248	0.2513	0.8567

CURRENCY	1 \$	1 £	1 DM	1 FR	1 YEN	1 LIRA	1 POUND	1 RYAL	1 DHR
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6524	0.5945	0.7246	0.1773	0.8247	0.5275	6.0022	1.1871
GBRITAIN STERLING	0.6052	1.0000	0.3598	0.4365	0.1073	0.4891	0.3192	3.6325	0.7064
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.6663	2.7766	1.0000	1.2048	0.2862	1.1662	1.9954	10.0985	1.9635
FRANCE FRANC	5.9411	9.3214	3.3536	4.0878	1.0000	4.6525	2.9757	33.8595	6.5474
JAPAN YEN	121.2500	200.3535	72.0825	87.8523	21.4840	1.0000	69.9805	727.7780	141.1711
HOLLAND GUILDER	1.8957	3.1325	1.1270	1.3737	0.3381	1.5635	1.0000	11.3785	2.3172
SWEDEN KRONA	8.1335	13.3802	4.1875	5.8721	1.4385	6.8933	4.2747	48.5995	9.4711
ITALY LIRA	19.3635	31.5553	12.0277	17.4845	4.7885	1.0000	10.3603	120.3603	24.3603
BELGIUM FRANC	34.7500	57.3715	20.4808	25.1848	6.5454	26.6351	18.3151	208.3995	40.3995
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	0.6763	1.1128	0.3833	0.4678	0.1278	0.5497	0.3428	3.9428	0.8128
GREEK DRACHME	2.8300	4.6783	1.6624	2.0507	0.5017	2.3340	1.4929	16.8665	3.4305
CYPRUS POUND	2.0378	3.3673	1.2115	1.4767	0.3812	1.6807	1.0750	12.2515	2.5175
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	11.8388	19.5578	7.0384	8.5768	2.0982	9.7618	6.2436	71.0431	13.8182
CANADA DOLLAR	1.5314	2.5355	0.9104	1.1097	0.2715	1.2630	0.8078	9.1918	1.7878
EURO	0.8567	1.4158	0.5093	0.6228	0.1519	0.7055	0.4519	5.1420	1.0305

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DHR

CURRENCY	1 \$	1 £	1 DM	1 FR	1 YEN	1 LIRA	1 POUND	1 RYAL	1 DHR
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6524	0.5945	0.7246	0.1773	0.8247	0.5275	6.0022	1.1871
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CANADA DOLLAR	1.5314	2.5355	0.9104	1.1097	0.2715	1.2630	0.8078	9.1918	1.7878
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CURRENCY	1 \$	1 £	1 DM	1 FR	1 YEN	1 LIRA	1 POUND	1 RYAL	1 DHR
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6524	0.5945	0.7246	0.1773	0.8247	0.5275	6.0022	1.1871
GBRITAIN STERLING	0.6052	1.0000	0.3598	0.4365	0.1073	0.4891	0.3192	3.6325	0.7064
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.6663	2.7766	1.0000	1.2048	0.2862	1.1662	1.9954	10.0985	1.9635
FRANCE FRANC	5.9411	9.3214	3.3536	4.0878	1.0000	4.6525	2.9757	33.8595	6.5474
JAPAN YEN	121.2500	200.3535	72.0825	87.8523	21.4840	1.0000	69.9805	727.7780	141.1711
HOLLAND GUILDER	1.8957	3.1325	1.1270	1.3737	0.3381	1.5635	1.0000	11.3785	2.3172
SWEDEN KRONA	8.1335	13.3802	4.1875	5.8721	1.4385	6.8933	4.2747	48.5995	9.4711
ITALY LIRA	19.3635	31.5553	12.0277	17.4845	4.7885	1.0000	10.3603	120.3603	24.3603
BELGIUM FRANC	34.7500	57.3715	20.4808	25.1848	6.5454	26.6351	18.3151	208.3995	40.3995
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	0.6763	1.1128	0.3833	0.4678	0.1278	0.5497	0.3428	3.9428	0.8128
GREEK DRACHME	2.8300	4.6783	1.6624	2.0507	0.5017	2.3340	1.4929	16.8665	3.4305
CYPRUS POUND	2.0378	3.3673	1.2115	1.4767	0.3812	1.6807	1.0750	12.2515	2.5175
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	11.8388	19.5578	7.0384	8.5768	2.0982	9.7618	6.2436	71.0431	13

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Commercial sections at Jordanian embassies seen inefficient in promoting local industries

THE DOMESTIC markets do not encourage local industries to expand but the stiff competition in outside markets spurs local export-oriented industries to seriously consider expanding, said Ghith Al Durrah, the marketing manager at Jordan Vegetable Oil Company. He saw the stiff competition as a hindrance in marketing and distributing local products.

According to the marketing manager, the Jordanian market cannot absorb the high number of companies and factories producing the same type of product. "That leads to price under-cutting and affects quality," he indicated. Durrah blamed the government for burdening Jordanian industries with fees and taxes and, consequently, limiting the capability of Jordanian products from spreading into international markets where competition is sharp from large world firms that enjoy the support and backing from their governments.

Although trade protocols are aimed at supporting local industries, Durrah indicated that

they do have some negative effects. "Protocols do not meet all the marketing requirements of the local industries in general as they include many restrictions and conditions in addition to a ceiling for the volume of exports," he explained. Furthermore, the marketing manager expressed dissatisfaction over the functions of commercial sections at Jordanian embassies abroad saying that they do not carry out the required role of marketing and promoting Jordanian industries.

He demanded that the role of the commercial sections be activated to serve the national economy and that real support be given to local industries in the area of marketing. Durrah urged the creation of an official entity that would study outside markets and provide sufficient information about these markets to exporting Jordanian industries free of charge. He also asked that all imports for industries, such as production inputs, machinery or spare parts be exempted from fees and taxes (Al Ra'i).

Real estate broker describes decline in prices of lands as normal

THE DROP in real estate trading was estimated by a broker to be around 30 per cent below what it used to be during the years of high activity. But the broker, Ahmad Hamdan, describes the decline as normal. He explains that the size of real estate sold during the past years has exceeded the actual needs of the people especially when taking into consideration the population of the Kingdom.

Noting that such a saturation has led to a slight recession in the real estate sector, Hamdan indicated that the high prices for land have

discouraged the low-income groups from buying land to build homes and that has widened the recession.

The real estate broker pointed out that many people are also refusing to sell under the present circumstances because they have bought lands at high prices when the economy was in better shape. He concluded that many investors moved to southern areas expecting investment projects after the peace process, but political developments at present have dashed their hopes (Al Dustour).

Presentation promotes CeBIT as most popular of Hannover's fairs

By Jean-Claude Elias
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A presentation on Hannover's international CeBIT show was held recently in Amman. The event, which

was attended by the German ambassador to Jordan, Peter Mende, and many professionals from the computer and the business communities in the Kingdom, was organised by Wafiq Tillawi & Sons Co., agents for "Deutsche Messe A.G." in Jordan, Syria and Palestine.

Jörg Schomburg, managing director of "Deutsche Messe AG", delivered a most interesting presentation on the largest exhibition of computers, communications and information technology (IT) in the world.

Attracting each year a staggering 700,000 visitors in a city normally populated by 500,000, the CeBIT has become a major industry. Numbers are eloquent enough: 27 exhibition halls with an area of 456,000 sq-metres, 7,500 exhibitors, an open air site

of 167,000 square metres, 32 conference rooms, 46 restaurants, and parking space for 45,000 cars.

Schomburg introduced the concept behind the "Deutsche Messe," an organisation that goes well beyond the display of computers and IT. Indeed, the "Messe" (German for Fair) hosts a cycle of business trade fairs all year round for industries as varied as textile, timber, commercial vehicles, poultry production, carpets and flooring coverings, and so forth.

The CeBIT, organised each year in March, remains by far the most popular of Hannover's fairs. It has recently grown to such gigantic proportions that the organisers had to create an additional "CeBIT Home" show that takes place in August and that is more oriented towards the consumer market, the original CeBIT targeting the business world.

In addition to splitting the show, and to serve better the visitors who cannot possibly explore all stands, each hall has been assigned a specialty: software, computer networks and communications, PCs and hardware, peripherals (printers, etc.), accessories, etc.

Schomburg also explained that the organisers are not trying currently to increase the number of visitors, but on the contrary to keep it within controllable limits, and more particularly to make the event more business-like.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Your mind is moving so quickly, even you have trouble keeping up. You're also very physically agile today. That could come in handy, because there's a lot going on. You'll have to move quickly to stay ahead of the pack. Go on and push into an area you don't know by heart. You'll learn as you go along.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Money's coming in, money's going out: your mission is to wind up with a profit. An older person could come through with some extra loot today, if you ask nicely. You'll have to explain how you want to use it, as well as how you'll pay it back. If it's for something the other person thinks is important, you'll clinch the deal.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There's opposition today, but instead of arguing, just go along with whatever the other person has to say. You'll know who it is. He or she wants to teach you something, and you'd be wise to go ahead and learn it. Somebody surprising could turn out to be your best tutor right now.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) One person can't find what he wants, another got the wrong size, a third wants to make an exchange. It's a frenzy — indicating the holiday season has begun. Your situation may not be exactly like that, but close enough to recognise. Be patient. By tomorrow, things settle down, and you'll be more capable of handling what's going on.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Looks like you'd rather be with one special person discussing a private matter. You may have to rearrange your schedule so you can spend time together over the weekend. Between now and then, you're just going to be too busy. If you can't get together for a meeting, perhaps you can keep in touch via phone or e-mail.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) An older person is pushing you to do something that doesn't interest you. Perhaps you could stall a little longer. You can't do everything for everybody, so you have to put your own people first. In other words, don't volunteer for overtime. The folks at home need your attention more than this other

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1998

person does.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) Things are happening quickly, and opportunities are coming to you rather than the other way around. You'll be delighted with the results of inquiries you put out earlier. The people you talked to are coming to you to learn. You knew it would happen eventually, and it's always wonderful when it finally does.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) Money seems to be slipping through your fingers at an alarming rate. Don't despair. There's more where that came from. It looks like there's a great deal of money coming in over the next several weeks. There may also be a lot of work involved, but that's OK. For you, it's a child's play.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Things are changing, and they're not all changing the way you'd like. Well, you can have a say in the matter, and your vote will count more than you thought. Don't let a plan that hasn't been carefully thought out get put into practice. Point out the flaws you see, and the overall results will be better in the long run.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) This day is too busy for anything but concentrating on the job at hand. There's a conflict between two people you work with, or have to work through, and communication is required.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You and your sweetheart have a conversation going that you just can't let stop. It's not really an argument. It's more like a fascinating exchange of ideas. The only trouble is that you're supposed to be doing something else, which you're not interested in at all. Well, it makes for an interesting day, to say the least. Do the best you can.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Home and family are important to you, but so is your career. How do you juggle them? Your career is interesting and you want to pay attention to it. People have questions and you want to give them the answers. Somebody at home also needs your attention. You'll just have to figure out a compromise. Luckily, you're smart enough to do it.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19)

There's a lot going on, and you're about ready to fall in a heap. Steer yourself closer to home before that happens. That's the best place for you to be this weekend. You'll still be active in making lots of changes. You'll probably be physically active, too, but you need to be close to your home base. You need the security.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Shop carefully today. You only want to get the most practical, longest-lasting product and best possible deal you can find. If you wait until this evening or tomorrow to shop, you'll more willingly go out of your way for a good bargain. You're more impatient earlier in the day, so schedule your time accordingly.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You're very sharp and highly admired. You might even be admired highly enough to ask for a raise in pay, and get it. You'll have to assure someone that you can do what you're promising, of course. Make sure you have a plan to carry through on what you say, so there's no problem later.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You're feeling more powerful and decisive. You're going to let people know what they can and can't do, nicely, of course. You're tired of being stomped on, and you're not going to let it happen again. This is good. When you come out strong, people respect you more — and they do what you say. You'll love it.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Although your heart is strongly pulled in one direction, the rest of you has to be somewhere else. There's something that has to be done, and no way to wiggle out of it. That's OK. The love you share with this person will be there when you finally make the connection. In fact, it'll be stronger.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Somebody's pushing you to do something you don't want to do. Your muscles for resisting this kind of pressure should be getting stronger by now. As you stand up for yourself, others treat you with more respect. Pretty soon they get it. They're not even trying to push you around. Stick to your guns. It looks like you're right about this one.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23)

You want to try something you've never done before. On the other hand, you still have things on your schedule that you've done before and you have to do on a regular basis. You don't get to give up any of the old stuff, but you should be able to add more to your schedule. That's the idea, anyway.

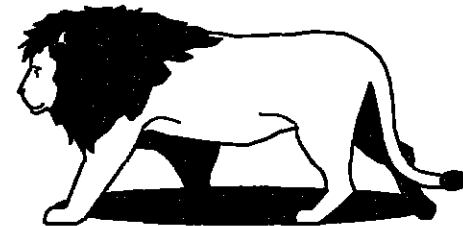
SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) You're getting more comfortable with your financial status, and you know there are more opportunities if you're willing to make the effort. That's not difficult for you, since your energy level is so high. You could handle three or four jobs, and maybe you already do. This is the time of year for people like you to make it.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You and another person have an important decision to make about money, and how you're going to spend it. While the money belongs to both of you, you've got the most at stake, as well as the best ideas. You've got more information, more of a vision and more enthusiasm to make this project work. Definitely speak up.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Don't stress over the job you're doing right now. The cavalry's coming to the rescue. Someone who can handle work you find difficult is just waiting for you to give the signal. It may even be several someone, and you may not have realised that's what they were doing. If the first avenue is blocked, try an alternate route.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You have work to do, but you'd rather play with your friends. This is awful. People are noticing that you're not the scholarly intellectual you make yourself out to be. No, you're just a fun-loving person who'd rather be goofing around than plugging away at your agenda. Don't worry, it'll all work out.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You're pulled in three different directions, and wishing you could clone yourself. Well, you can compromise. By moving more quickly than usual, you can get two or three things done instead of one, and that should give you time this evening for romance. Don't worry.



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Dubai Rally grand finale to Middle East series

Jordan has biggest team among 11 nations

DUBAI (J.T.) — The stage is set for an intriguing grand finale to the 1998 FIA Middle East Championship Thursday, with the Dubai International Rally providing a dramatic last battle for two major titles and introducing an historic car rally to the region for the first time.

Among the 11 countries represented, Jordan has sent a five-car team which is one of the largest from outside the host nation in recent championship history.

Jordan's 1997 champion Mohammad Daoud and 1995 titleholder Bashir Bustani will be leading the pack, alongside Faris Bustani, Lee Dunn and Ammar Haddad.

Sheikh Ahmad Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, president of Dubai Civil Aviation Department, will flag away a quality field of 36 drivers from 11 countries from the start at the Al Bustan Rotana Hotel at 10 a.m.

The Arab World's No. 1 driver, Mohammad Bin Sulayem, is the top seed and overwhelming favourite, having already clinched his tenth drivers' title two rounds back in Lebanon, and is chasing his 11th

Dubai title in 14 years.

Following Sulayem away from the start will be another UAE driver, Sheikh Abdullah Ben Faisal Al Qassimi, the former national champion aiming to clinch his first Middle East title by overhauling Aussie Ron Cremen for the Group N production class down.

Behind Al Qassimi comes the Austrian, Rudi Stohl, who is a World Championship veteran but lacks desert driving experience, while UAE-based Lebanese driver Michel Saleh takes the wheel of Group A Toyota which could power him to one of the top places.

German Karl Heinz Lerch, a frequent visitor to the Middle East, will be aiming to follow up his fifth place overall in the UAE International Rally earlier this year, while Cypriot, Flides Christakis, is seventh seed in a Group A Mitsubishi Lancer.

While the Middle East Championship's Group N title is set for a gripping showdown, with Cremen holding a one-point lead from Al Qassimi, the Formula Two championship hopes of Cypriot,

Nearchous Nearchou, were severely dented when his Skoda was withdrawn yesterday after being stranded in Qatar, the venue of the previous round of the regional series.

It means that his closest rival, Britain's Amrik Sehmbi, will clinch the title if he finishes in the top four in Formula Two in Dubai.

The government of Dubai has given the rally a major show of support, and Sheikh Ahmad will be joined at the start tomorrow by representatives of the official sponsors, Dubai Ports Authority and Jebel Ali Free Zone Authority.

Two days of top quality rallying will follow, finishing back at the hotel at 4:30 p.m. on Friday after 16 special stages and 292-km of competitive driving.

Held under the patronage of Sheikh Ahmad, the Dubai International Rally is organised by the Automobile and Touring Club for the UAE, the national motor sport authority.

The 1998 Dubai International Rally will be remembered for taking the regional series into a new era with the introduction of the Middle East's first his-

toric car rally, an exciting spectacle set to spread to other championship rounds next year.

Five cars of yesteryear will grace this groundbreaking event held on part of the main rally route, which moves away from the familiar Jebel Ali desert plains for the first time to tackle several new special stages in the Al Dhaid and Madam areas.

The classic cars include a Mini Cooper, driven by Adam Weisberg, while 1997 Peking to Paris winner Philip Surtees drives a classic Sunbeam Alpine.

The three other historic cars taking part are a Ford Escort, driven by Kenya's Alistair Cavenagh, a Porsche 356 driven by England's Mary Kane, while her husband, Paul Kane, is behind the wheel of a Ford GT 350.

"This rally has all the ingredients to make it one of the most successful we've held," said Derek Ledger, event director for the Dubai International Rally and the FIA's Middle East representatives.

Second Division Basketball Championship

Wihdat, Homentmen and Fuheis look for victory

By a Staff Reporter

STANDINGS

AMMAN — The Second Division Basketball Championship — probably the last event on the Jordan Basketball Federation's (JBF) current agenda — has started with eight teams taking part.

Three teams — Wihdat, Homentmen and Fuheis — seem to have the best chance to clinch the two qualifying berths to the first division next year.

Wihdat, playing for only their second year, were runner-up to Al Jeel last year. Homentmen, a formerly first division team, are struggling to regain their place for the third year now, while Al Fuheis were a considerable threat to the top teams last year. Missing from the event is Al Watani, also a former First Division team who were relegated but failed to participate in the second division.

In the opening matches Wihdat scored a big 108-46 (55-24) win over Ashrafieh, Homentmen beat Al Rayeh 77-53 while Fuheis defeated Abu Nusair 72-58. The fourth match between Ebbin and Samma was postponed.

According to JBF spokesman, two teams will be promoted this year making the total number of First Division teams eight instead of six. The JBF this year organised only three other events: the first division and the Under-14 won by Al

Team	P	W	L	SF	SA	Pts
Wihdat	1	1	-	108	46	2
Homentmen	1	1	-	77	53	2
Fuheis	1	1	-	72	58	2
Abu Nusair	1	-	1	58	72	1
Rayeh	1	-	1	53	77	1
Ashrafieh	1	-	1	46	108	1
Samma	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ebbin	-	-	-	-	-	-

Thursday's matches

Wihdat-Abu Nusair	4:30 p.m.	Terra Sancta
Homentmen-Ashrafieh	6:00 p.m.	Terra Sancta
Samma-Rayeh	4:30 p.m.	Hassan Sports City
Fuheis-Ebbin	6:00 p.m.	Hassan Sports City

Orthodox, and the under-16 won by Al Jazireh.

The women's, juniors, and under-22 were cancelled while the JBF is discussing holding the under-18 with the concerned clubs.

The first division includes Al Jazireh, Al Ahli, Al Jazireh, Al Jalil, Al Hussein, Al Jeel.

Ribbeck hints Basler may be axed

BONN (R) — Germany coach Erich Ribbeck hinted on Wednesday he may axe midfielder Mario Basler from the national squad.

The Bayern Munich player was widely criticised for a poor performance in Germany's 1-1 draw with the Netherlands in a friendly last month.

Media reports claimed he was involved in late-night card games at the squad's training camp in the days before the match. Basler has denied the card games went late into the night and also disputed that large sums of money were involved.

In comments published by Sport Bild magazine, Ribbeck avoided mentioning Basler by name but made clear he would not shy away from making controversial decisions when he names his squad later this month for a trip to the United States.

"When I pick the squad I'll take into account all my impressions in the first three matches under my supervision. That means performance on the pitch and behaviour off it," said Ribbeck who took over as Germany coach in September.

"One or two players will be missing. I'm making things very clear. Anyone who knows me knows that I don't shy away from unpopular decisions."

Basler said he had not heard from Ribbeck. "I think he should call me first before he goes public," Basler told German television on Tuesday night after scoring in Bayern's 3-0 German Cup win over VfB Stuttgart.



Boxer George Foreman, former heavyweight world champion, poses after a news conference in Beverly Hills, where he and Larry Holmes announced their upcoming bout scheduled for January 23, 1999 at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. This is the first time each has faced the other in the boxing ring, with the fight labeled "The Birthday Bash" in honour of Foreman's 50th birthday (Reuters photo)

Virenque fights 'overwhelming' doping evidence

PARIS (R) — Frenchman Richard Virenque faces a fight against "overwhelming conclusions" to clear his name in the wake of this year's Tour de France doping scandal.

Festina rider Virenque claimed dope tests cleared him of all suspicion after he had heard the results of an initial report from Patrick Keil, the magistrate investigating the scandal, at his Lille office on Tuesday.

Yet police and legal sources who had access to the long report handed to judge Keil by two Parisian doping experts insisted its conclusions were

"overwhelming." "All of the nine Festina riders took doping substances ranging from steroids, corticoids, growth hormone, erythropoietin (EPO) and, for four of them, amphetamines," police sources said.

Virenque, once his country's most popular rider who was tested with his team mates after Festina was kicked out of the Tour on drug charges, said exactly the opposite.

"All the biological parameters and test prove scientifically that I'm not doped," Virenque said.

Only when judge Keil has

completed his investigation will it be known exactly whether Virenque took illegal products. And the probe will take months.

Judge Keil himself is forbidden by law to unveil any element of the enquiry.

"The experts say things, I say other things. It is your job to find out what is true," Virenque told journalists on leaving the judge's office.

Sources close to the probe said Virenque was trying to make the situation as confused as possible as he is negotiating with a number of teams for next season.

The French rider has been linked with Swiss team Tag-Heuer and Italy's Mapei or could remain with Festina, but a deal will depend largely on whether he is innocent of doping charges.

The French Cycling Federation (FFC), the only body entitled to impose sanctions on French riders, said they were awaiting Keil's investigation to be completed.

Even then, it is unlikely Virenque would be punished by the FFC since, from what has leaked of the dope test report, his hematocrit level, which is used to detect the taking of EPO, is below that

authorised by cycling authorities.

Virenque confirmed his hematocrit level was 49.3 per cent which is far higher than the level of an average person — around 43 per cent — but is under the 50 per cent rate authorised by the International Cycling Union (UCI).

Legally, Virenque has nothing to fear either since drug consumption is not an offence in France.

Only if it were proved without any doubt that he took substances other than EPO would he face punishment from sports authorities.

His team mates who confessed to taking drugs were handed six-month bans.

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<p>CINEMA TEL: 469-4144</p> <p>PHILADELPHIA '1'</p> <p>Richard Gere .. in</p> <p>RED CORNER</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL: 469-4144</p> <p>PHILADELPHIA '2'</p> <p>Jeff Bridges .. in</p> <p>WHITE SQUALL</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL: 569-2318</p> <p>PLAZA</p> <p>Comedian Mohammad Huneidi .. in</p> <p>SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL: 567-7420</p> <p>CONCORD</p> <p>CONCORD '1'</p> <p>John Travolta & Emma Thompson .. in</p> <p>PRIMARY COLORS</p> <p>Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30</p> <p>CONCORD '2'</p> <p>FRENCH KISS</p> <p>Shows: 3:30, 5:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL: 593-4793</p> <p>GALLERIA 1</p> <p>ABDOUN</p> <p>www.cns.com.jo/Galleria</p> <p>Antonio Banderas .. in</p> <p>THE MASK OF ZORRO</p> <p>Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>CINEMA TEL: 593-4793</p> <p>GALLERIA 2</p> <p>ABDOUN</p> <p>www.cns.com.jo/Galleria</p> <p>Comedian Mohammad Huneidi .. in</p> <p>SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY</p> <p>Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30</p>	<p>Bisham Yanes Theatre TEL: 4625155</p> <p>Watch out for the new play</p>
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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.



LOCAL SPORTS SCENE

Futsal team leaves for Cairo

AMMAN — The Kingdom's futsal team Thursday leaves for Cairo, Egypt to participate in the First Arab Futsal Championship, which will start Sunday with Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Libya, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania taking part. The national committee in charge of supervising the event, headed by Arab Sports Federation Vice President Walid Kurdi, will meet Saturday to discuss the championship's regulations. Teams joining the activity will be divided into two groups. Meanwhile, the national team resumed its training after Badran Shaqran, Mutaz Rishbeh, Muhammad Mahadin, Hatim Agel and Hasounah Sheikh declined participation. They were replaced with Jamal Mahamoud, Mohammad Rajab, Mahmoud Abdullah, Wa'el Katkout and Basem Najjar.

Youth City stadium still awaiting maintenance

AMMAN — The Hussein Youth City's stadium is still awaiting for maintenance work to start of its lawn, to be able to host the 9th Pan-Arab Games which will be held in Amman Aug. 15-31 1999. The facility was expected to close down last month to begin replacing floor of the athletics range and maintaining general facilities and infrastructure.

Commemorative Speed Test to be held Friday

AMMAN — The Auto-Sports Complex in Madaba Friday holds a speed test at noon in commemoration of the late Nazmi Al Saeed, one of Jordan's sport pioneers, who passed away last month. The Jordan Press Foundation — Al Ra'i and other parties will provide trophies, medals and cash awards for the top three positions. Around 25 participants are taking part in the event, which will be the second of the winter season. Khaled Sa'i, who won the first speed test, driving a BMW2002, will be heading the competitors, including Yaser Jarrah/Renault Turbo GT, Mohammad Asfour/Ford Escort, and Samer Saliba/BMW323.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

South Korea lose as UAE qualify

BANGKOK (R) — World Cup finalists South Korea were beaten on a day that saw Turkmenistan, China and United Arab Emirates qualify for the second round of the Asian Games soccer tournament on Wednesday.

It was a miserable day for the Koreans, with the North eliminated and the South, one of the competition's favourites, turning a 2-0 lead into defeat after conceding an own goal and receiving the first red card of the tournament. A hat-trick by Eintracht Frankfurt striker Yang Chen helped China to a 4-1 win over Cambodia. They qualified with the maximum six points having beaten the Lebanon by the same score on Monday.

North Korea went down 4-1 in a penalty shoot-out to the UAE after six goals had been shared in the 90 minutes. With only two teams in the groups after Brunei pulled out of the tournament late last month, they were eliminated.

South Korea had looked to be well on their way to victory in their opening match after Choi Yong-Soo put them ahead with two minutes gone and added another in the 42nd minute.

But things started to go wrong when they conceded an own goal after an hour and then Lee Byoung-Keun was shown the red card for a second bookable offence.

Turkmenistan equalised in the 85th minute. Agay Muslim volleying into the roof of the net, and Igor Koslov added to the Korean's misery with a winner a minute from time.

Group E apart, the top two teams in each group qualify for round two.

Hong Kong's 5-0 defeat by Thailand meant they were eliminated. They had lost 6-0 to Oman in their opening game.

Asian Games

Kingdom's 56-member delegation leaves Friday

Kurdi — athletes intent on achieving advanced standings

By Aileen Bannayan

AMMAN — The Kingdom will be aiming to win its first Asian gold when competition starts at the Dec. 6-20 Asian Games in Bangkok, Thailand.

Jordan's delegation leaves for Bangkok Friday with high hopes of clinching medals and setting records at the biggest gathering of Asian nations.

"Our athletes have the ambition and the will to win medals. I hope we can do that," Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) Secretary General Ismat Kurdi told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

In its past two participations in the Seoul '86 and Hiroshima '94 Games, Jordan won three silver and five bronze medals — all in taekwondo.

The Kingdom now joins 41 countries in the last sporting event of the century with only Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan missing the event.

Kurdi underlined the importance of taking part in the Asian Games saying it was "part of plans of the Ministry of Culture and Youth to prepare teams for the upcoming Pan-Arab Games in Amman next summer and the 2000 Sydney Olympics."

"It is an invaluable chance to assess our teams and pinpoint our location on the map of Asian sports," Kurdi added after the meeting of Minister of Culture and Youth Talal Sata'an Al Hassan with the delegation Wednesday.

The minister will be

accompanied by JOC Vice Chairman Mouaffaq Al Fawwaz and Kurdi at the meetings of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) which will be held on the sidelines of the Games.

Kurdi said Jordan's delegation would update the meetings on preparations for the Pan-Arab Games and urge fellow ministers to support the West Asian Games.

Jordan will also follow up on its recent complaint of disqualification from the World Cup handball finals where Saudi Arabia took first place while Jordan came second on points with Kuwait and Bahrain. The organising committee gave Kuwait the runner-up spot.

The minister will also meet officials from the organising committee of the Sydney Olympic Games as well as Japanese Olympic officials charged with sports marketing who would be beneficial in that aspect of the Pan-Arab Games.

Jordan's best chances in Bangkok are in boxing, taekwondo and judo. The taekwondo team was the first batch of Jordanians at the Games as they arrived Thursday after concluding a ten-day training camp in Chinese Taipei.

The second group of athletes leaves Amman Friday with the official delegation while the karate and squash teams leave later in the week.

Only the soccer event of the Games has commenced with the first of around 10,000 athletes and officials arriving in Bangkok which

is grappling with a series of problems including traffic and health scares at the venues and hotels.

The Kingdom's delegation which includes 19 officials and 37 athletes will be competing in 11 sports: athletics, boxing, bowling, gymnastics, judo, karate, shooting, squash, swimming, weightlifting and taekwondo.

Jordan will not be taking part in teams sports — notably soccer, handball and basketball.

The national teams of these sports were negatively affected after their federations had their share of controversial issues to deal with. The basketball board declined participation after the freezing of all basketball activities following the federation's resignation which was retracted at a later stage.

The handball federation declined after Jordan achieved 9th place among 11 teams at the Arab Cup in Cairo.

Jordan's delegation includes medal winners headed by Mohammad Abu Khadijeh, one of the country's leading sportsmen having won the gold medal at the 8th Pan-Arab Games, the gold at the West Asian Games in Tehran and Jordan's only gold at the 18th Arab Boxing Championships which concluded in Tunisia recently.

The 56-member delegation also includes Pan-Arab Games boxing gold medal winner Basel Hindawi, judo's silver medallist Musa Khalaf, swimming's bronze medallist Hana

Jordan's delegation

Head of delegation
Jawdat Abdul Mun'em
Deputy head of delegation
Mohammad Darwish
Official
Aref Ishaqat
Journalists
Omar Bashtawi, Shibli Shatarat,
Adnan Tobasi
Physician
Dr. Mohammad Abu Ein

Athletics
Abbas Aziz (coach)
Taleb Rousan (official)
Mohammad Mutari (800m, 1,500m)
Muhammad Aayed (400m, 800m)
Tareq Najjar (shot put, discus)

Fakhruldin Fuad (high jump)
Shadi Qa'qour (100,200,400m)
Mohammad Abdul Baqi (triple jump, long jump)

Boxing
Maytham Amer (coach)
Ayman Al Nadi (60 kg.)
Basel Hindawi (over 91 kg.)
M. Abu Khadijeh (over 91 kg.)

Bowling
Mohammad Masri

Gymnastics
Jian Hwang (coach)
Ahmad Abdo
Shadi khouri

Judo
Anatoli Kalinsky (coach)
Tawfiq Suleiman (66-73 kg.)
Musa Khalaf (73-81 kg.)
Rami Dasouqi (60-66 kg.)

Karate
Ahmad Mutaw'e (coach)
Khalil Farran (under 65 kg.)
Butheina Mahsiri (over 60 kg.)

Shooting
Aysar Hayari
Mazen Khatib
Nizar Madi
Mohammad Hiyari

Squash
Wael Tabbalat (coach)
Saa'd Hijazi
Mohammad Saeed
Majd Njada

Swimming
Ali Nawwas (coach)
Hana Majaj (100,200, butterfly)

Weightlifting
Shong fu Dong (coach)
Aayed Khawaldeh (under 56 kg.)
Awad Aboudi (over 105 kg.)

Taekwondo
Mikhled Assaf (official)
2 coaches
Zaha Talhouni (under 47 kg.)
Aliysar Matar (47-51 kg.)
Ahlam Bino (51-55 kg.)
Nancy Hindi (55-59 kg.)
Luma Abu Judum (63-67 kg.)
Ala' Kriket (67-71 kg.)
Mohammad Hamed (71-75 kg.)
Ali Asmar (75-81 kg.)
Mohammad Abul Ruz (81-85 kg.)
Mohammad Farajeh (85-91 kg.)
Hussein Tahleh (91-99 kg.)
Ibrahim Agel (99-105 kg.)

Majaj, and weightlifting's Aayed Khawaldeh who became the first Jordanian to win three bronze medals in any event. The athletics team

includes Fakhraddin Fuad — a gold medallist in the high jump; Butheina Mahsiri who won bronze in karate; taekwondo gold medallist Hussein Tahleh,

silver medallist Mohammad Abul Ruz and Ibrahim Agel and women's team silver medallists Zaha Talhouni, Nancy Hindi, and bronze medallist Ahlam Bino.

Cash crisis turns Bangkok Asiad into austerity games

BANGKOK (AFP) — Asian Games organisers Wednesday dug into their pockets to limit fallout from the economic crisis sweeping the region which has forced major cuts in competitor numbers.

Laos and Cambodia are to get free accommodation in the Games Village and North Korea will pay only half the \$50 daily charge for each athlete.

Hardly a nation among the 41 expected in Bangkok has escaped the crisis that started in Thailand in July last year and since rolled around Asia.

Some top Thai officials admit the Asian Games, which has cost hundreds of millions of dollars, could not have come at a worse time for the hosts.

About 10,000 athletes had been expected. But this has

now been reduced to nearer 8,000.

"They have cut back so much it hurts," said one European coach in Malaysia of his team's budget. "Some of the athletes are now calling it the 'Austerity' instead of the 'Asiad'."

Pride has forced the hosts to enter 808 athletes — more than any other nation. Other nations have ruthlessly cut back.

The Japanese Olympic Committee ordered each federation to cut entries to the bare minimum. Every Japanese athlete must have a chance of finishing in the top six to get to Bangkok.

Japanese federations wanted to send 735 athletes, but the Olympic committee cut the number by 100. The number of officials was slashed from 351 to under 200.

South Korea, which finished second in the medal table in Hiroshima four years ago, has made officials and coaches bear the brunt of cut.

Its Asian Games delegation was cut from 800 to 710, including 546 athletes.

Expenses have been slashed and a Korea Sports Council official said: "The crisis has affected training and morale." Because of financial problems many coaches face immediate unemployment after the Games.

Taenung camp head Lee Sang-Kyun said the training budget had been cut by more than 15 per cent. "Our national sports are in a dismal state because of the economic crisis," Lee said.

Malaysia and Indonesia have also been badly hit. Malaysian athletes will wear the same uniforms they

used for ceremonies at the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games in September.

Sieh Kok Chi, secretary general of the Olympic Council of Malaysia said athlete numbers had been cut with some sports withdrawn altogether.

"When the budget was approved two years ago, it was 2.5 ringgit to the dollar, now it is 3.8. We have to pay more ... so we have to take steps to ensure cost falls within the budget," he said.

Sieh also complained that the \$50 a day cost for athletes in the Games village was too high.

The organisers helped Cambodia after it said it did not have the money to send its



Fireworks illuminate the night sky in Bangkok during a rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the 13th Asian Games. Nearly 10,000 athletes and officials from 41 countries will take part in the December 6-20 Games (Reuters photo)

70 athletes to Bangkok.

Indonesia has also cut numbers for Bangkok, but the Indonesian National Sports

Council (KONI) has been forced to promise coaches higher bonuses if their athletes win medals.

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New bomb kills
wounds 30 in

Netanyahu's intervention came as the Israeli leader sought to shore up his political support, badly shaken by splits in his coalition between relative doves and hardliners opposed to giving up more of the West Bank.

He met former Foreign Minister David Levy again on Wednesday to try to woo him back into his cabinet as national infrastructure minister. There was no immediate word on the outcome.

A Palestinian youth behind burning tyres throws a stone at Israeli troops during clashes in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Wednesday. Heavy clashes erupted in Ramallah after an Israeli car was ambushed by Palestinian demonstrators following a protest against Israel's refusal to release a large number of Palestinian prisoners (AP photo)

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq accused Western powers on Wednesday of inflicting a creeping health and environmental disaster in its southern provinces by firing radioactive munitions in the 1991 Gulf war.

Opening a conference to highlight the effects of depleted uranium ammunition used by the United States and Britain, officials said cancer cases had soared in parts of south Iraq and radiation levels were unusually high.

"Irreparable damage has hit the Iraqi people and environment which gives Iraq the legitimate right to compensation," Ministry of Health Under Secretary Shawki Murcus said.

Murcus listed a catalogue of ailments including congenital defects, muscle disorders, fatigue and cancer cases, and said the two-day meeting would show they were caused by the depleted uranium used in the 1991 fighting.

"We have established a link between depleted uranium and these cases," Murcus said.

The conference brought together Iraqi researchers, foreign scientists and doctors. American and British war veterans also returned to the country they fought seven years ago, seeking answers to what they said were their own unexplained ailments.

Iraqi officials say allied forces estimated they had used 300 tonnes of depleted uranium munitions against Iraqi forces, but that other researchers put the figure at 700 to 800 tonnes.

Sami Al Araji, who serves on a government committee studying the aftermath of the 1991 war, said air, soil and water samples taken near Iraq's border with Kuwait showed abnormally high levels of radiation.

Jawad Al Ali, a cancer doctor in Iraq's southern city of Basra, told Reuters his hospital had registered 400 new cases this year, including a high proportion of lymphomas and leukaemias he linked to radiation, compared to 116 in 1988.

Cancer deaths jumped to 303 last year from 34 in 1988, he said.

With its health services devastated by eight years of sanctions imposed for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Iraq says it cannot afford expensive cancer drugs to treat the afflicted let alone the huge cost of decontaminating affected areas — already some of the poorest and worst-hit by the sanctions.

It has tried for years to pin the blame for the health crises in the south on the use of depleted uranium (DU), a dense metal used to make armour-piercing projectiles.

DU emits less radiation than naturally occurring uranium but retains radioactive properties.

Britain has said DU rounds can produce small amounts of radioactive and toxic particles on impact, but it is unlikely that anyone outside the target area would be affected.

But Ray Bristow, who served in the Gulf war as a British medical operations technician well behind battle lines, said he was tested positive for depleted uranium last month.

"I didn't think for one minute I'd be affected because I wasn't in the battlefield," Bristow told reporters. "I was exposed to DU at levels 100 times normal levels. It makes me wonder what happened to those on the front line."

Colin Purcell-Lee, who served in the same medical unit as Bristow, said Britain was trying to suppress information about depleted uranium because of fears it would be held liable for illnesses suffered by soldiers on both sides.

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The PLO wants to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is willing to give limited autonomy to the Palestinians.

Qatar and Oman are the only Gulf Arab states to maintain low-level relations with Israel. The UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia demand that Israel reach comprehensive peace deals with the Palestinians. Syria and Lebanon before establishing ties with the Jewish state.

Police said Abu Seda was ordered detained for 15 days for "bribery from a foreign country with the purpose of

said the EOHR received \$25,000 to publish a statement claiming police torture of minority Copts in A Kosheh village in southern Egypt.

"We fear that this is a step to try to clamp down on human rights activists and to intimidate the EOHR," Tokhi said.

ict warns bu

In a broadcast on Taleban-run Radio Shariat, the group ordered buses carrying only women to be encased in curtains. It also said a curtain

threatening national interests, and spreading false news."

Tokhi said EOHR has received foreign donations since 1993, but never to publicise any particular case.

The EOHR is the largest human rights organisation in Egypt and was the country's first when it was set up in

arrests and mistreatment in the village, but said that it was not only directed at the village's Coptic population. The police roundup of villagers followed the murder of two Copts in Al Koshah in August.

The head of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Pope Shenouda III, said in a state-

Egypt says its 62 million population includes six million Copts. Coptic leaders say their community numbers 10 million.

The Copts are descendants of ancient Egyptians who adopted Christianity in the first century AD and refused to convert to Islam after the Arab conquest.

drivers to hide women passengers

in following the Taleban's rules.

For example, the broadcast said some drivers have been playing music, an offence that is punishable by a public beating. Other drivers have had long hair and or wore "shiny clothes."

"The driver should be dressed in simple clothes, nothing shiny and his hair

gers," said the broadcast.

The deputy head of the religious police, Maulvi Mohammed Sharif Haqqani, also warned bus drivers to hire only young boys below 15 to collect fares from women. Even then, the boys should not mingle with the women.

The Taleban now controls 90 per cent of Afghanistan.

women, forcing them off the job, out of school and into long robes called burqas that cover them from head to toe.

On Wednesday religious police patrolled the bus depots in the city to ensure the latest edicts were being enforced.

"It is like a cage... no one can see the driver and no one can see the women

sex. Women are barred from driving.
But drivers have been lax

should be short and he
should wear a cup and not be
seen by his women passen-
As it has imposed its harsh
rule, the Taleban has been
especially restrictive toward
said one bus driver, who
gave his name only as
Mushtaq.

LONDON (R) Absinthe, the fiery green tittle with a high alcohol content, is making a comeback in Britain after an 80-year absence. The drink, renowned for its hallucinogenic properties, has been banned in France, Switzerland, Belgium and the United States since World War I, but was never formally outlawed in this country. Now the drink, which packs a serious kick with its content of up to 75 per cent alcohol, is being marketed as the perfect way to see in the millennium.

The means that information about Iraq which the U.S. obtained under a cover of [U.N.] Security Council resolutions were said over to the Pentagon and that the American military plans were based on this and in the letter, a copy of which was published in the papers.

The United States and Britain have said they remain ready for military action.